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WHAT DO ART FAIRS DO?  
THE CASE OF ART DUBAI

Dissertation presented to Universidade Católica  
Portuguesa to obtain a Master's Degree in Culture  
Studies,  
Management of the Arts and Cultures

By

Eva Zmpogko

Faculty of Human Sciences

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## **Abstract**

In a period of social and political volatility, the art world and the art market cannot remain untouched (Tefaf Art Market Report, 2017: 10). Changes, some of which are radical, have been noticed, bringing a new balance to the art world. This balance is characterized by many different notions, and one of those notions, that even manages to create new perceptions to what we knew so far, is the institution of the international art fair.

But what do really art fairs do? This paper, the title of which has been inspired by Maria Lind's curated Eleventh Gwangju Biennale (GB11), under the title *The Eighth Climate (What does art do?)* (ArtReview Asia, 2016), will start with a general introduction to the history of art fairs and how they formed to what they are today. It will then examine critically the relation of art fairs to contemporary society through three main extensions: society, politics and the art market.

In order to answer this question, we will focus on a specific example as a case study: Art Dubai, an emerging art fair developed within an interesting social and political framework, that brought a fresh air and new standards in the art market of Dubai in the past twelve years. It managed to put the city to the spotlight of the international art map while aiming to become a bridge in discourse for the East and the West (Shannon, 2013: 260). With a critical examination of the long list of educational and non-profit activities supporting Art Dubai's social goals, we will observe the political extensions that have been vital to its operation as well as the financial elements that generated new aspects on the local art market. This analysis is aimed at finding a series of possible answers for our research question

In the conclusion, the updated image of the institution of the art fair will be presented, within social, political and financial extents, as a reflection of the case study in relation to the theoretical framework of the research.

**Key words:** international art fair, society, social change, politics, art market, Art Dubai





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## **List of Acronyms**

- Abu Dhabi authority for Culture & Heritage – ADACH
- Art Institute of Chicago – AIC
- Artist in Residence – A.i.R
- Campus Art Dubai – CAD
- Corporate Social Responsibility – CSR
- Dubai Design District – d3
- Dubai International Financial Centre – DIFC
- His/Her Highness – HH
- Institute of Contemporary Arts in London – ICA
- Los Angeles County Museum of Art – LACMA
- Middle East and North Africa – MENA
- Société nationale des beaux-arts – SNBA
- The European Fine Art Foundation – TEFAF
- United Arab Emirates – UAE
- Valued Added Tax – VAT



## 1. Introduction

In times of rapid and fierce change, artists and their works show different and enlightening perceptions of the world we live in (Crimmin, 2014). It is because of the contemporary character of every contemporary artwork and its nexus of concept and realization that one can have a glimpse beyond the aesthetic image of it (Santos, 2018) and reach the deeper meaning and message of its creator within our surroundings. In this sense, art as a form of mediation, like an almost vivid organism, follows its own evolution, always in correspondence to the current social, political and cultural happenings of everyday life (Gemtou, 2008: 200).

The space of art –a prototype for the social sphere- (Proctor, 2018), provides an opportunity for trial and error in different models of organization and dialogue (Proctor, 2018). Particularly, in the wake of recent political and economic movements and in the advent of technological development in our globalized world, while political structures seem both fragile and fractured, and as the future seems difficult to re-imagine, those models are far reaching experiments, not only about the art itself, but also about the boundaries of the social. How does art respond to those new challenges? With more global events than ever, opportunities to meet other people, travel to distant lands and appreciate the cultural dichotomies arise. Surely, especially after the rise of globalization in the art world and the accelerating interconnectivity of human activity, there has always been this Euro-centric constant fascination with so-called different cultures -from Latin American art, to Middle Eastern art, to Chinese, to African and soon and so forth- (Robertson, 2018). Some could call it a post-colonial discourse through the aesthetic umbrella of contemporary art, but the truth is that this is simply a form of expression of the necessity that the global community has to understand each other (Proctor, 2018). The above can be considered one of the main reasons why over the past two decades a significant increase in the number of local and international art fairs has been noticed, as well as a continuously increased interest from the art professionals regarding this change.

Everything described thus far creates the general image of the socio-political context in which contemporary art has evolved in the last decades. But while borrowing the views of Niklas Luhmann on social society and in general in “Systems Theory”, one can see that this socio-political context is closely related to the social evolution through one main element: the notion of communication. On a similar note,

in a contemporary society like the one in which we are living, a large number of systems can be detected. Those systems are linked and vary in the way they function (they can be organizational, functional or interaction systems). They can also vary in their core, as amongst others they can be social, political and economic (Albert, 2016). Keeping this in mind, and following Luhmann's idea that those systems are linked through an ongoing indirect communication, as this can be developed with the use of linguistics, but with an interaction that comes as a result of constant changes, it comes with no surprise that the past years, the art world has been led to believe that the art fairs have become the key elements that form the international art market. Society and politics change and evolve, bringing new perceptions to the way that art and everything around it (including the art market in its connections to the social and political spheres) is presented. This dissertation, will try to report in one of those new perceptions, the institution of the contemporary international art fair, and on the different ways it has been developed, in relation to social, political and financial aspects of the contemporary society, while taking a closer look at the different impacts it has presented on different aspects not only of the art world but also on society itself.

In the present research these notions and approaches get their own meaning through two directions: (1) our main research topic, which is the institution of the art fair, and (2) the case study of Art Dubai.

Some may possibly wonder why this particular case study has been selected. The answer lies in two main reasons: (1) Over the past years a resurrection of the Middle Eastern contemporary art scene has occurred, which has lit up the interest of the West towards the so-called Middle Eastern art and culture. It could be argued that this interest has social, political and financial extensions, and as it will be further developed, it is within these extensions that Art Dubai, the only international art fair of the region was created, presenting a unique dynamic and aiming to create a bridge between those two seemingly very different worlds. (2) Art Dubai as a case study presents a significant importance for the field of culture studies. Starting from the first reason, many generations of Middle Eastern artists have inherited a kind of legacy of war and loss, of everyday struggle, capturing in their works subjects ranging from mourning families to old women commemorating their lost children (something that can be noticed in the work of painters and photographers, such as Abbas Kowsari (see



figure 1).



Figure 1  
Abbas Kowsari (Tehran, 1970)  
*Shade of Earth* (2008)  
Photography  
Variable Dimensions  
Caravan of Light Series  
Courtesy of Abbas Kowsari

Middle Eastern artists, especially the ones that are still residents of the so-called Middle East, have to follow certain rules and regulations that may subsume their individuality and keep their true self from being revealed (Neshat, 2011). Public personas and private lives are two distinct zones, creating paradoxes in everyday life that can lead to a form of cultural schizophrenia. For the ones living abroad, one can detect in their works a critical view, that not only heightens one's sense of perception but also reveals how their art is perceived by others (Neshat, 2011). The younger generation of Middle Eastern artists is making a statement by criticizing the West's perception of Middle Easterners as potential terrorists, no matter the truth. Within this context the two regions are always shifting and influencing each other. Nevertheless, there are enough differences between the East and the West requiring a bridge in discourse, as ontologically, they are two stable categories with transcendent qualities. This takes us to the establishment of an interesting art scene established in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This art scene consists of three different elements: (1) the museum complexes of Abu Dhabi, (2) the biennale of Sharjah and (3) the art galleries of Dubai and Art Dubai, the only international art fair in the region (Karezoumi, 2017). Art Dubai is one of the main components of this newly established art scene,

and has been created within a context of political and social changes, affecting with its own turn the art market not only of Dubai but of the entire UAE, and rapidly becoming one of the most effective bridges between the West and the East through its function.

It is exactly this function that brings us to the second reason that Art Dubai was chosen as the case study, and that explains its importance for the field of Culture Studies. In order to get a more concrete understanding of this choice, it is necessary to bring to mind Raymond Williams' *Analysis of Culture* (1961). According to Williams there are three general categories in the definition of culture: the ideal, the documentary and the social. Starting from the ideal, which is conceived as "[...] a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute values" (Williams, 1961), and focusing on the aspect of cultural identity, perceived by us and for the purposes of our research as an absolute value, we should bring in mind the words of Simon Clarke, according to whom:

"[...] the notion of identity as shaped not just in relation to some other but to the Other, to another culture. The notion of cultural identity becomes much stronger and firmer when we define our 'selves' in relation to a cultural Other." (Clarke, 2008)

Art Dubai brings different people and different cultures together, under the same roof. As an international art fair it creates a bridge that aims to cover any gaps between the West and the East, in a non-religious, non-national, non-ethnically defined space for exchange. This does not mean the creation of an international, new form of contemporary art, without specific elements based on the region of their creators, but a new, deeper and more philosophical understanding. In this sense, within the scope of this dissertation different examples that prove that Art Dubai can indeed become the link between different cultures, ideas and discourses through its platform will be examined, something which happens through a large number of initiatives, such as talks, workshops, and other non-profit and educational activities.

Getting now to the second of Williams' categories, the documentary one, which is conceived as "[...] the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded" (Williams,

1961), it can be acknowledged that the birth and the evolution of Art Dubai gives us a lot of information about a specific period of time in a specific location. Taking as an example the inauguration of this institution, it happened while there was a significant financial growth in the area as a result of the oil exploitation in the UAE as well as a real estate boom in Dubai. On a similar note, the evolution of the fair during its twelve years of existence also provides a narrative for the participating artists and galleries, that seem to have a common cultural background. Nevertheless, while still considering Williams' second category, maybe the most important relevance of Art Dubai can be found in the words of Liam Gillick, while referring to contemporary art. Considering that Art Dubai is a platform for –mainly- contemporary art, we could say that it is not promoting only the practice of this art form, but also, and most importantly the social and political context in which this art has been perceived and developed (Gillick, 2010).

Lastly, as per the third and last category of Williams' approach, there is a social dimension, in which “[...] culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behavior” (Williams, 1961). As a fact, it is within the notion of this social dimension of culture that art can be identified as a means of dialogue and discourse, and as a clear reflection of our times. Art Dubai, in this case, gives us the chance to explore the connection between the art world and the art institutions with social and political issues, whether that be positive or negative ones (examples of censorship and restrictions because of certain political orders will also be examined). Additionally, it provides a better understanding of the “convivial cultural” as this has been presented by Paul Gilroy. According to this theory, the notion of conviviality provides a fertile ground for intercultural dialogues that cannot only help us to come together, in a contemporary society like the multicultural one we are living in, but also acknowledge our differences and similarities with mutual respect and understanding (Gilroy, 2004).

This takes us to the idea of Lawrence Grossberg on *The Heart of Culture Studies* (2010). A deeper investigation on the history and the elements of Art Dubai can give us a better understanding on how people with different backgrounds can get together in order to provide an intellectual, social and political work, responsible for “changing

context in geographical, historical, political, intellectual, and institutional” traditions (Grossberg, 2010). As it will be further developed in this paper, the overall institution of the art fair is based on hierarchical structures, a fact that can possibly justify the economic, social, cultural and political trajectories that are being developed around its main function and its relations of power.

The above, justifies and explains the selection of Art Dubai as our only case study, and also it presents the reasons why such a case study and a report, are of a significant importance for the field of Culture Studies.

Art fairs are more than just an art event, as through their different functions they can enhance social movements or even have political undertones. Taking this into consideration, one must acknowledge the cultural significance of art fairs. And thus we come to our main research question, which will be contextualized with the help of secondary questions.

Having said that, as the main research question, the following can be identified: What do art fairs do (in the social, political and economic realms)?

The secondary questions that will be gradually answered through our research and that will help us in the final, main conclusions are:

- 1) In which ways has the institution of the art fair been involved with the current social challenges and the need for social mediation?
- 2) Does the institution of the art fair hide a political agenda, and if so, in which ways does this affect its core function?
- 3) Keeping in mind that United Arab Emirates (UAE) have presented an inflated economy and economic growth, how has this affected the evolution of Art Dubai?
- 4) How does Art Dubai reflect on sociopolitical challenges?
- 5) How do art fairs, and Art Dubai in particular affect the international art market and how does this relate to sociopolitical challenges?

In order to answer these questions, there will be an indicated methodology followed. The starting point will be based in drawing a theoretical framework grounded in the existing and quite extensive bibliography related to the general notion of art fairs’ history, initiatives and relation to the art market. These bibliographical

references will be accompanied by a number of art market reports and reviews from different media sources.

In an attempt to have a critical perspective towards the issues discussed and presented, any information related to art fairs in general, and even more related to the case study, Art Dubai, will be discussed and observed along the conceptual framework and analyzed in depth. This will help us create our own narrative that will eventually give answers to our research questions and establish the existence of Art Dubai within a sociopolitical framework, tightly connected with the art market, on an international and local scale. Methodologically, the case study is not only observed and presented but also critically analyzed.

As per the structure of the dissertation, it consists of a main body of work with three individual topics, all of which contribute to the better comprehension and development of our main topic. The first chapter, titled “The Historical Evolution of Art Fairs”, will present historical facts and information on the existence and evolution of the institution of the art fair. There will be a recursion proving that the idea of art fairs –as we know them today- has been incubating for a long time in human societies, and that even with some necessary attempts, trials and changes, the core values of this institution remain the same.

The second chapter, under the title “International Art Fairs in Contemporary Society”, starts with an introduction to the elements that form international art fairs, elements that include certain political and social contexts and structures (both particular and general). These have formed the standards that all international art fairs seem to follow and in which they seem to be based, such as the hierarchical structure of the institution. This model and its structures, become the trigger for the following discussed topics, related to the political undertones of the art fairs. Through different examples we will try to understand if and how art fairs get political, not only through the observation of what they show - including presentation of political works in the galleries’ booths - but mainly through an analysis of their organizational and artistic structures. Within the same context, the mediation processes that have been developed over the last decade within the art fairs’ platforms will be discussed. The different ways and means that art fairs have presented a social responsibility mainly through non-profit and educational initiatives will be examined, not focusing only on the visitors, patrons or collectors that attend such events, but also to the exhibitors and the

presented artists. And even though it would be easier to list the different ways that art fairs present a social responsibility towards established artists, while understanding the various difficulties that emerging artists face when entering the art world and art market, on the body of this paper there will be a focus on the ways that the art fairs can become a platform for emerging artists, and mainly for their welcoming and eventual establishment in the art world. All these elements support another argument while still discussing international art fairs, which is how this somehow newly established institution became a key player in the art market over the past two decades. This discussion will start with a brief exploration of the art market, its history and its main categorization, which will help on getting a better understanding of everything that follows, and most particularly on how art fairs have generated artworks' sales. We will demonstrate using different facts and examples, how artworks' sales have been formed and how this new image has affected the individual players of the art market –such as the galleries-. And as it is understandable that such big changes do not have only positive outcomes but also negative ones, what will follow on the research is a brief presentation of the ways that “The Art Fair Age” (Barragan, 2008), has had a negative impact on the contemporary art world in an international scale, for both galleries and artists, once again with the use of different examples. And it is because of exactly these negative aspects, that one cannot help but wonder whether this new era really is a sustainable model. Based on observations and theoretical works –such as *The Culture Theory* (1944) of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, or Maria's Lind views on *Why Mediate Art-*, a map will be created, with important indications to be taken into consideration, which will also create the framework of our field of research of our case study, Art Dubai.

This brings us to the third, main chapter of this dissertation, with the title “The Case of Art Dubai”. This chapter will start with a narrative of the birth and evolution of Art Dubai. After briefly presenting the context in which Art Dubai was conceived and indicating the reasons that such an international art fair was inaugurated in this specific time and place, there will be a detailed mention of the names of the people who contributed in its establishment. What will follow is a timeline of all the important changes that this institution went through, until it reached the image that it currently has. Considering that such an image includes significant social aspects and moves, with the use of –as previously mentioned in the description of the methodology- theoretical works, a critical analysis and overview of everything that

the Art Dubai group has presented as its social action because on their non-commercial nature will take place. There will be a detailed presentation of each one of those programmes, which will be followed with a critical view as per our approach from the lenses of Culture Studies. On a similar note and with a critical angle, the dissertation aims to get closer to the political undertones that Art Dubai seems to present, on both regional and international levels, with the use of different examples which may hint at political inclusions within the function of the institution. For this subchapter, there will be a special focus on incidents of censorship and on the process of selection of the participating galleries, especially after considering the notion and theories around globalization. Once again, as in the previous chapter, what will follow will be a closer look on the relation between the art market of the Emirates –with a special focus on Dubai-, and the institution of Art Dubai. In this case, except from financial elements and reports that will draw the image of this interaction, there will be a special focus on Art Dubai's patrons and sponsors, as they seem to have played a crucial role in the evolution and continuation of the fair.

All the above will lead to the final chapter of conclusions. In this chapter, the research question will be extensively discussed and – hopefully – answered. The updated image of the institution of the art fair will be presented, within social, political and financial extents, as a reflection of the case study in relation to the theoretical framework of the research.





## 2. The Historical Evolution of Art Fairs

### 2.1 How it all started

There has been a long way until art fairs reached to the artistic and international image and format they have today, a way that for many goes back to the ancient years and the religious festivals and gatherings, that the worshippers used to hold (Morgner, 2014: 320). How exactly were they held in its inception?

It might be useful to start with the etymology of the word fair - originated in the old English and specifically by the word *fæger*<sup>1</sup> which means beautiful – pleasant to the sight (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2018). Such beautiful events would take place on specific days each year and most commonly, on days related to name days of specific gods (Morgner, 2014: 320).<sup>2</sup> Those annual festivities were of great importance, as they were not only helping religion and commerce to come together, but were also the main opportunity for the elite to show and display the qualities of the empire in from of the eyes of the entire population (Morgner, 2014: 320).<sup>3</sup> In those events, the people that would attend, would often bring with them food and other valuable items,<sup>4</sup> a fact that eventually would give to the celebrations a social character, as they were transforming to small-world networking events. It is important to mention, that those valuable items, were the main reason why the religious festivities started becoming closely associated with trade, justifying what as it is mentioned above that “they were helping religion and commerce to come together” (Morgner, 2014: 320).<sup>5</sup> This statement has two aspects. The first one, is related to the wealthy visitors of the festivities, who knew that by buying some of the rare and luxury goods they would acquire the social status they were aiming for, and the

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<sup>1</sup> “The word *fæger*, came from the Germanic and Norse *fagar* and *fagr*, for beautiful.” (Whitefield-Madrano, 2011). Although many believe that the word “fair” comes from the latin word “*feriae*”, which means holidays or holy days (Morgner, 2014: 320).

<sup>2</sup> Such festivities were common in different civilizations, including the ancient Greek, Roman Empires, Aztec and Inca Kingdoms and during the Han-Dynasty (Morgner, 2014: 320).

<sup>3</sup> As people from different locations were gathering at the same place for those festivities, eventually this helped in the development of those civilizations in other forms, such as the transportation, a fact that made these celebrations attractive to a larger number of people (Morgner, 2014: 320).

<sup>4</sup> Sometimes those valuable items were not tangible, as the elite would find the opportunity to educate and inform the masses that would attend, about general norms, rules and regulations. Those teachings were not relevant to the festivals, but they were crucial for the smooth operation of the entire territory (Morgner, 2014: 320).

<sup>5</sup> This can be considered one of the main factors why the religious festivals started spreading in more and more places, gathering a vast number of population (Morgner, 2014: 320).

second one, is related to merchandisers, who knew exactly what to expect during those days and they would try to sell the type of products and the elite would seek for.

What is important to notice here, is that those celebrations as described above, - according to Morgner-, had three important notions: (1) they would manage to connect people from distant lands; (2) they would mean the interruption of every day routine for all the citizens of the empire; (3) they had a special purpose, through which they would create a social and merchandise connection, a preliminary stage of net-working as we know it today, for the entire empire (Morgner, 2014: 320). What can be seen here, is that those beautiful events taking place in days dedicated to gods, gave space to a business-like structure to be developed, and it can be considered a religious quality that persists in the art market even today. And here, Sarah Thornton can be quoted, who claimed that “the contemporary art world is a loose network of overlapping subcultures held together by a belief in art” (Thornton, 2008).

## **2.2 The first changes: The Champagne and Artisanal Fairs**

In the centuries that followed, the first actual changes were made that would function as a transition to the fairs, as we know them today. Having the Roman Empire as a core, those changes were brought with the emergence of the artisanal fairs, fairs that would include not only fine art –paintings and sculptures- but also crafted goods (Morgner, 2014: 321).

How were those fairs different from other religious festivities? The artisanal fairs would take place annually and in smaller, chosen locations, whereas religious festivities would be more frequent and in larger spaces so that they could host the people of the entire empire. Here there is a first understanding on how even those preliminary artisanal fairs were closely related to politics, as what has been noticed, is that the dissolution of the Roman Empire on the 5<sup>th</sup> century paused all activities closely related to merchandize, a situation that continued until the 7<sup>th</sup> century and the rise of the Frankish Kingdom (Morgner, 2014: 321).

It was around that period when the first example of the artisanal fairs made its appearance, at Saint-Denis in France. Established by the Merovingian kings, the

Saint-Denis fair was a seven-week long fair, with starting date the 9<sup>th</sup> of October<sup>6</sup> and ending date the 29<sup>th</sup> of November.

In the fair, which was taking place every year at the Place Panetiere's covered markets and at the abbey's main cemetery, merchants with different products would attend, selling from wool and woolen cloths to wine and honey, while this was an opportunity even for the monks living on the abbey, to sell the wine that they had produced in its extensive vineyards (Saint-Denis Culture, 2018)<sup>7</sup>.

This kind of fairs started expanding to more and more places around the world for the next centuries, facing their critical decline on the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But even after their decline, the artisanal fairs had managed something really important: to set the main inner structure for the future art fairs, in the formula that we know them today. The characteristic of those fairs was the gathering of rare goods of exceptional quality, the gathering of people from many different places on the same dates and locations each year. It became a unique platform –given the time- for sales and observation, which would show the importance of aesthetics in the way of presentation of the goods and the creation of a common range of prices for similar goods (Morgner, 2014: 322). Especially for the formation of prices, it is important to take a closer look at the similarities with the market model defined as “mirror”, as this has been developed by Harrison C. White in 1981 (Morgner, 2014: 324). According to this model, the formation of the prices was not made according to their possible demand, but according to the prices that the competitors would have, a context that shows how the artisanal fairs resembles to the majority of modern markets (Morgner, 2014: 324).

Additionally, it is important to mention that it was thank to the artisanal fairs that the concept of the dealer -as we know it today- made its appearance. To be more precise, art dealers could come together and form a collective, something that would easier allow them to attract local and international clients. They would later lease a booth from the fair organisers where they could welcome their large network,

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<sup>6</sup> The 9<sup>th</sup> of October was the anniversary of the martyred Saint Denis and the date of an annual pilgrimage to his tomb (Saint-Denis Culture, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Saint Denis Culture, *The Saint Denis Fair*, Retrieved from: [http://www.saint-denis.culture.fr/en/3\\_5a\\_foires.htm](http://www.saint-denis.culture.fr/en/3_5a_foires.htm) (accessed in May 25, 2018)

constituted of friends, families and professionals, building the relation and connection with the buyers and the artisans from different countries<sup>8</sup> (Morgner, 2014: 326).

It is important here to mention, that at a parallel time, Champagne fairs made also their appearance (Morgner, 2014: 322). But what exactly where those fairs and why it is worth mentioning at this point? The Champagne fairs -that first appeared on the 12th century- were periodic trade fairs held annually and in a rotating basis, in four small towns of Champagne<sup>9</sup>: Bar-sur-Aube, Lagny, Provins and Troyes. They were held six times a year and each fair would last approximately six weeks, leaving a break to the merchants to travel to the next destination of the fair<sup>10</sup> (Edwards and Ogilvie, 2011: 1).

Especially since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Champagne fairs operated as the main and most important tool of empowerment for international exchange and merchandise in Europe, as the presence of Italian, North African, Palestinian, Syrian, Russian and Chinese traders was now a fact that gave to the fair not only a strong net-working character but also a financial sophistication accompanied with a new system of payment services, due to its international importance (Edwards and Ogilvie, 2011: 1). This can be also considered the reason why many scholars like Chapin, Bautier and Pirenne, consider the Champagne fairs the core of Medieval geography, industry, monetary factors, shipping, business organization, warfare and taxation, and tend to draw lessons for modern developing economies from the Champagne fairs example (Edwards and Ogilvie, 2011: 2). The reason why is that, is simple: The Champagne fairs relied on two key institutions: the household and the patron-client relationships. On the first case, the household was mainly interested in taking care of its own members, whereas on the second case, the patron-client relationships were built on a concept of mutual exchange (Morgner, 2014: 324).

The international presence was not the only institutional change that Champagne fairs offered to the history of fairs. Champagne fairs were the first ones to

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<sup>8</sup> The first art dealers appeared in Antwerp of Austria in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in one of the city's fairs. They were called *Schilderpenden*, and they were later associated with artisanal art fairs (Morgner, 2014: 326).

<sup>9</sup> Champagne was considered a country and sovereign polity that was incorporated into France in 1285 (Edwards and Ogilvie, 2011: 1).

<sup>10</sup> In those fairs, the products that constituted the core of the trade, would be cloth and wool brought by the Flemish and French traders, exchanged with spices and other luxurious goods brought by the Italian and Provençal merchants (Edwards and Ogilvie, 2011: 1).

ensure the security of the merchants travelling to and from the fairs<sup>11</sup>, and also ensure the property rights of the traders (Edwards and Ogilvie, 2011: 3). Moreover, they were the first ones to provide a contract-enforcement, through their four-tiered system of public law-courts<sup>12</sup>, and the first to create a hotel to facilitate the accommodation of the visiting merchants<sup>13</sup> (Edwards and Ogilvie, 2011: 5,11).

From everything mentioned above it can be understood that the Champagne fairs were strongly supported by the political authorities. They guaranteed the essential security and property rights, they regulated weights and measurements, they worked on the development of the infrastructure, and implemented every minimal requirement that would help the market-based economy to flourish.

The catastrophic decline of the Champagne fairs came only in the beginning of the next century, as a result of different factors, from financial to merchandising ones, and mainly because the commercial revenues of the fair were severely reduced, especially compared to the administrative ones<sup>14</sup> (Edwards and Ogilvie, 2011: 18), a fact that left some space to the artisanal fairs to continue their function until the 18<sup>th</sup> century and their decline, as mentioned above.

Before closing this sub-chapter, it is crucial to demonstrate in a way, the display of the fairs for the period of the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Keeping always in mind that those were temporary fairs that would welcome an increasing –until their decline– number of merchants and visitors, the merchants wanted to find a way to attract the

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<sup>11</sup> In order to ensure the safety transportation of the traders travelling for the fair, considerable political and military resources were dedicated to the extensive guarantee beyond the territorial boundaries. These measurements were taken after moneychangers from Vezelay were robbed on their way to the fair. The reaction of the ruler of Provins was immediate as he wrote to the regent of France saying: “*I will not let take place with impunity such an injury, which tends to nothing less than the ruin of my fairs*”. When a similar incident happened one year later, he wrote him again saying (referring to the nobleman who would conduct the robberies): “*If you wish to chastise him and march against him with an army let me know: I will assist you in extracting vengeance from him.*” Those are only two of the incidents that took place, and that led to measurements that would secure the safety of all participants to the fairs (Edwards and Ogilvie, 2011: 4).

<sup>12</sup> The first tier was the highest princely court in Champagne, *Jour de Troyes*, which judged important cases and heard appeals from lower courts. The second tier consisted of the courts of the four *baillis*, which judges cases involving high-status parties. The third tier consisted of the courts of the *prévôts*, who as representatives of the prince rendered justice to commoners. The fourth tier consisted of village courts operated by *maires*, officials appointed by the prévôt to render justice to each village. After Champagne became part of France, the France crown retained this four-tiered structure of courts in the territory, and superimposed the *Parlement de Paris* as a final court of appeal (Edwards and Ogilvie, 2011: 5,6).

<sup>13</sup> The hotel was the *Hôtel-Dieu*, founded in Provins in c. 1160 (Edwards and Ogilvie, 2011: 11).

<sup>14</sup> For commercial revenues we refer to rentals on halls, stalls and hostels and for administrative revenues we refer to forfeits and fines, sealing and default fees (Edwards and Ogilvie, 2011: 18).

visitors and enhance the quality of the goods. And according to the goods sold, was the temporary organization of the fairs arranged, having the same products arranged close to each other, so that the visitors could compare before they could buy (Morgner, 2014: 325). To paint a better image of the above description, we can use the words of Daniel Defoe, while describing the Stourbridge fair<sup>15</sup>:

“[...]the shops are placed in rows like streets, where of one is called Cheapside; and here, as in several other streets, are all sorts of trades, who sell by retail and who come principally from London with their goods; [...] in a word all trades that can be named in London; with coffee-houses, taverns, brandy-shops, and eating-houses, innumerable, and all in tents, and booths. [...] In another street parallel with the road are like rows of booths, but larger and more intermingled with wholesale dealers, and one side, passing out of this last street to the left hand is a formal great square, form's by the largest booths, built in that form, and which they call the Duddery [...] Here the booths, or tents, are of a vast extent, have different apartments, and the quantities of the goods they bring are so great, that the insides of them look like another Blackwell-Hall, being as vast warehouses pil'd up with goods to the top.” (Morgner, 2014: 325)

What can be pointed out from the above description, is that there is a large number of tents and booths, the products were categorized in different sections as per their composition, there is a main square in which the booths with exceptional goods could be found, giving the chance to the visitors to spot them quite easily and facilitate their work, layout that reminds as a lot the way that even contemporary art fairs are using.

### **2.3 A New Transition**

Quietly and a bit later than the complete decline of the Champagne fairs in the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and a bit earlier than the decline of the artisanal fairs in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we have the appearance of two new type of fairs.

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<sup>15</sup> Stourbridge fair was one of England's most important fairs from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Morgner, 2014: 325).

For the first one, local, national and international fairs would assemble their objects, in the so called “sample fairs” (Morgner, 2014: 327). But there was a main difference between sample fairs and the artisanal fairs: This new type of fairs, was not designed to direct sales on spot, but mainly dedicated to the advertisement of new items, products and techniques, taking the form of what we know today as industrial exhibitions. This might be considered also one of the reasons that even though artworks from all around the world were presented in those fairs, Sample Fairs never managed to become the leading structure of the art fairs as we know them today (Morgner, 2014: 327).

Another reason for this failure can be considered also the second type of fairs/exhibitions that made its appearance at the same period, the “Salon” or “Salon de Paris”. Starting back in 1667<sup>16</sup>, as an exhibition of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, Salon functioned for a few years as a semi-public exhibition that turned into an art fair open to the wide public seventy years later, in 1737. Salon became one of the most influential elements of the art scene<sup>17</sup>, as it would be the one to set the reputation of the participant artists, set the public taste and the prices of the artworks exhibited (Widewalls, 2018). That could also be noticed by the fact that different government bodies started sponsoring the Salon in 1791<sup>18</sup>, and only four years later, the Royal Academy would be replaced by the Fine Arts School, giving the chance to more interested artists to participate. (Art Institute of Chicago – AIC, 2018) Slowly and thoroughly the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Salon became an annual event and was designated as the “official exposition” (Exposition Officielle, 2018) (AIC, 2018)<sup>19</sup>.

The undeniable power that Salon had gained over the years, made the selection of the participant artists quite strict, leaving an increasing number of rejected applicants outside of the Salon’s doors annually. The disappointment not only of the artists but also of the public, led to the birth of a new show/fair, the “Salon des

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<sup>16</sup> Although some first catalogues for Salon, the “*livrets*”, were first issued in 1673.(AIC, 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Of course it is important to mention that it was only Salon de Paris who had this kind of influence, as The Royal Academy of London also started having this functions after its establishment that took place a few decades later (Widewalls, 2018).

<sup>18</sup> In 1881 the French government would stop the sponsoring, a function that would be undertaken by the Société des artistes français (SAF), which held annual exhibitions until 1914. From 1915 to 1918, there were no Salon taking place, as their operation was revived only in 1919, with the support of Société nationale des beaux-arts (SNBA) (AIC, 2018)

<sup>19</sup> Art Institute of Chicago (AIC), Finding Aid for Paris Salon Catalogs, Retrieved from: [http://www.artic.edu/sites/default/files/paris\\_salons\\_fa.pdf](http://www.artic.edu/sites/default/files/paris_salons_fa.pdf) (accessed in May 27, 2018)



Refusés” in 1863<sup>20</sup>, that would present works from artists that had been rejected by the Salon (AIC, 2018). As it has been mentioned by Robert Rosenblum in his book *19<sup>th</sup> Century Art* (1984): “[The Salon des Refusés], was a place where artists at war with the authority could be seen and where the public could go either to jeer or to enlarge their ideas of what a work of art could be” (Art Binder, 2016).

## 2.4 Contemporary Art Fairs

Almost a century later - on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September of 1967 - in the historic building of Gürzenich, the first art fair as we know it today would take place, with the inauguration of Art Market Cologne (Kunstmarkt Köln) (Morgner, 2014: 327).

Art Market Cologne –that was later renamed Art Cologne-, a vision of two Cologne-based gallerists, Hein Stünke and Rudolf Zwirner, had a profound impact on the international art market, as it was there to bring a new life to the insufficient art market in West Germany<sup>21</sup> (Herzog, 2016: 23). Although its initial role was to promote young, emerging German artists and introduce them to an international audience, Art Cologne seemed to exceed the initial expectations, and become the formative influence for the art market development of the evolution of the art fairs (Herzog, 2016: 27). The format that it followed was simple: structured after the Stuttgart Antiquarian Book Fair<sup>22</sup>, paying too much attention on the display hoping it would get the required international attention, and allowing –especially in the beginning- a limited number of strictly German galleries to showcase their works (Morgner, 2014: 328).

These limitations gave the idea to three Swiss art dealers Trudi Bruckner, Balz Hilt, and Ernst Beyeler, who also happened to meet during Art Cologne, for the creation of a new art fair, Art Basel, in 1970, in the Swiss city of Basel, with more than 16,000 visitors attending the inaugural edition of the fair, with ninety galleries and thirty publishers from ten different countries attending (Art Binder, 2016). Art

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<sup>20</sup> The Salon des Refusés, was held by command of Napoleon III, and over the years of its existence it exhibited among others Odilon Redon, Henri-Édmond Cross, Paul Signac, Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Vincent van Gogh, and Georges Seurat (AIC, 2018).

<sup>21</sup> At that point, Paris had started losing its central role as the European capital of modern art world and French art was losing ground on the modern art market leadership. At the same time, at the end of the war West Germany lost its capital, that was now Bonn, and that unexpectedly gave the chance to West German economy to act as the main hub for the entire western European economy (Herzog, 2016: 52).

<sup>22</sup> A fair of high value and rare objects (Morgner, 2014: 328).



Basel, which in terms of display and structure was similar to Art Cologne, tried to engage a larger audience of international art dealers, that could participate after the selection of a set jury, for which, the art dealers had to rent a booth within the fair (Morgner, 2014: 328). What was groundbreaking for the standards of art fairs at that time, was the net-working structure that Art Basel offered, a structure that would facilitate connections among art dealers and gallerists but also with professionals from outside of the local networks attending the fair (Morgner, 2014: 328). The result of that, was that all those art dealers and professionals, would contribute to the reputation of the fair itself, attracting an increasing number of international clientele.

Almost a decade later, in the end of 1980, there was the appearance of another type of fair, the so-called “niche art fair”. The purpose of these fairs, which would take place in big metropolis of the art (mainly London and New York), was to bring to the spotlight of the art dealers and collectors works on paper, “...works that cannot compete with more expensive artworks for wall space”, as the producer of the fair, Sanford Smith, would claim (Morgner, 2014: 330). The London shows, would focus on prints, drawings and other similar mediums by local artists, whereas the New York based shows, would focus on prints and fine art. But in both cases, with works produced in the same period of time.

The golden years of niche art fairs, and all the other fairs that were active for this past decade would come to an end in the late 1980s with the big collapse of the Japanese economic bubble that caused the art market to falter and many galleries to go bankrupt (Morgner, 2014: 331). The result of such a crisis, was that art dealers decided to invest in big and secure art fairs like Art Cologne and Art Basel, making them once again the main core of the art market. Additionally, since 1970 and the birth of Art Basel and until 1990, the number of international art fairs remained relatively low, with one or two fairs founded per year. It is important to mention that those fairs would not emerge in big cities like New York or London, but to cities that did not have a large concentration on galleries, and countries that did not have such a developed art market<sup>23</sup>, but possessed an array of wealthy and powerful collectors (Morgner, 2014: 329). Cities that fit the above description, were –among others- Basel, Cologne, Madrid and Bologna (Morgner, 2014: 329).

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<sup>23</sup> In most of the cases these cities were also clustered in small areas that as a result had the attraction of a small number of visitors (Morgner, 2014: 328).

By the end of 1990s, a time that also marked the end of the economic crisis, the art fairs had already been tested and proved that with the right changes and adjustments, they can be applicable and sustainable in different contexts, a fact that turned them into global institutions, with a creative and intellectual image, counting more than 270 international art fairs worldwide (Morgner, 2014: 331).

The above recursion gives us the chance to realize for how many years the idea of fairs has been incubating in each contemporary society. And although it had to change names and maybe even policies (from religion fairs to artisanal fairs and the Salon de Paris), the concept of the fairs managed to keep some of its most important features untouched –and even further develop them–, like its networking character, establishing them to an integral part of the art –and not only– financial system. This is a fact that can be proved even by the continuously increasing numbers of fairs, international and locals, along with the increasing number of galleries and artists participating to those, facts that give us only a small idea of the importance that those institutions have for the contemporary art system and market.

### 3. International Art Fairs in Contemporary Society

#### 3.1 The International Art Fair Model

This last sub-chapter might be the right trigger for analyzing further the consistency of the elements that have formed the standards of international art fairs as we know them today. And even though there is not one set model to frame this institution, on the following sub-chapters, we will discuss aspects of how the international art fairs constitute a response to a particular time and place, as they become a mediation site for strong sociopolitical agendas, and affect the international art market in various effective ways. As a methodology to understand these characteristics of art fairs, we propose a closer look to the conceptual framework and elements that contributed to what we will call from this point and until the end of this paper, as International Art Fairs.

While talking about the 19<sup>th</sup> century's world fairs, Walter Benjamin used the phrase “places of pilgrimage to the commodity fetish<sup>24</sup>” (Walter Benjamin cited by Chin Davidson, 2010), an idea that even though it was addressed at a time when fairs had a very different image from what they have today, it still remains apropos. At that time, Benjamin was inspired by the fact that tendencies towards imperialism were making their appearance, at a period when art exhibitions had been produced mainly to showcase the national production capacities and to promote colonial empires (Chin Davidson, 2010). In order to get a better understanding of what is mentioned above, we will set as our example the Venice Biennale, the oldest Biennale that set the standards for all the other Biennales that followed (The Economist, 2017). At this point a distinction is essential. Even though both institutions (biennales like the Venice Biennale and international art fairs) have an international showcasing aspect, which is the main reason why this comparison is being drawn, they present major differences. Biennales are large-scale exhibitions of contemporary art, that usually take place every two or three years, named after their host city and typically managed by a combination of public art, museums, government agencies and philanthropic supporters (McAuliffe, 2016). On the other hand, art fairs, as they have already been

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<sup>24</sup> The presentation of fine arts mainly from Europe and North America in palatial art temples could occur without their art makers, and what was considered as primitive arts was commonly known as ‘fetish’ (Chin Davidson, 2014).

explained on the previous chapter, are kind of a trade show that brings together art dealers, art advisors, collectors and curators, on an annual basis (Artspace, 2013).

Closing this explanatory parenthesis, and getting back to the mentioned example, it could be considered that for the Venice Biennale, it all started during the “age of empire”, a period that Lenin himself would characterize as having economic roots in a new phase of capitalism that would eventually lead to territorial division of the world among the great capitalist powers (Hobsbawm, 1994). This as a fact would reflect on the origins of the participants in the Biennale, that would show in a clear way the so-considered supremacy of European and North American nations<sup>25</sup> (Chin Davidson, 2010). If those nations, along with others that were added in the core body of the Biennale through the years, are organized as a hierarchy of nations, and can be considered the community of this institution, what is noticed is that they appear to follow the scheme and the priorities of global capitalism (Chin Davidson, 2010). Borrowing now what Hardt and Negri would present as “global empire” in their work *Empire* (2000), we understand that there exists a capitalist power that articulates the activity of globalization within institutions like the Venice Biennale or any other contemporary art fair. By accepting this idea, we come to the conclusion that the old-nation-statist idea of empire cannot be used for defining contemporary cultures (Hardt and Negri, 2000), and the territorial determination of the art fair, can possibly still exist in the form of a competition among nations, under the aims of art (Chin Davidson, 2010).

Following now the suggestion of Chin Davidson and specifically examining the example of the international art fairs, the theory of Walter Benjamin for the dialectical image<sup>26</sup> can be considered, according to which “the image is dialectic at a standstill, while the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent” (Benjamin, 1982: 462), an idea that could be also implemented in international art fairs, as it is able to provide a useful perspective on the different ways in which social and political aspects affect the art market and the art world, through points that will be discussed below (Chin Davidson, 2010).

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<sup>25</sup> For generations at the Venice Biennale, the nations that would always exhibit and have representation were Italy, France, Britain, Germany, Belgium, Sweden, Hungary and the United States (Chin Davidson, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Walter Benjamin introduced his idea of the “*dialectical image*”, in his unfinished Arcades Project (1927-40) while discussing the problem of interpreting history and the conditions of a past epoch (Chin Davidson, 2014)

Using once again the Venice Biennale as an example, it can be acknowledged that it is by nature a visual remainder from the time in which it was firstly created, as it presented for many years in its entirety, endangered and deceptive relationships, mainly in terms of classification of aesthetic<sup>27</sup>. This aesthetic classification, somehow did manage to impute art and ethnographic objects to the coordinate nation/region that led to the fair's model of displaying objects in hierarchical spaces. Nowadays it does serve as an event that bespeaks of a "post-Other" art world (Benjamin cited by Chin Davidson, 2010), just like the utopic "dream image" of the old arcades served a potential "classless society" in Benjamin's work. And by accepting this resemblance, it can be transfigured what past and historical art fairs (or fairs in general as they have been presented on the previous chapter), stood for in terms of empire and culture (Chin Davidson, 2010).

The above theories lead to two main developments on how art fairs have articulated different conflicted modes of juxtaposition and on how they set the standards to what we know today: the value of things and the vanity of artworks (Chin Davidson, 2010).

The starting point could be the value of things, in terms of the financial, aesthetic and cultural aspects. As it has been described in the work of Chin Davidson, the very first fairs to ever take place showed the tendency of displaying the value of objects by visually dramatizing the worth of the objects. Aesthetic and cultural value would come in contrast according to Marx's critique, which would try to define the use, surplus and exchange value in relation not only to other tangible elements, but most importantly in relation to the lives of people who labor to produce such commodities (Marx, 1977). The fairs came to justify Marx's theories, by providing means to demonstrate the classificatory order in terms of both the status of objects and the status of nations (Chin Davidson, 2010). Following the same idea, Paul Greenhalgh would argue in his *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs*<sup>28</sup> that:

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<sup>27</sup> This is mainly because Venice Biennale, just like fairs, for many years demonstrated how art works were produced solely by European and North American nations (Chin Davidson, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> The Exposition Universelle in Paris, back in 1889 –according to Greenhalgh- would become the primary example where ethnological villages became integral part of art fairs. The value of such exhibitions, and especially of the objects that would be presented in such cases, was mainly in their function as props in the narratives given by the tableaux for classifying 'primitive cultures' (Chin Davidson, 2014).

“Fine art practice at international exhibitions thus had a hierarchical dimension based on race. In social Darwinian terms, the Europeans made fine art, by comparison with Europe India did not, but in the absence of Europe it was allowed to use the label; Africans did not make fine art, but were condemned in advance to be craftspeople only. The category implied then not only an elitism within the visual arts but one within peoples also.” (Greenhalgh, 1988).

What can be understood from the above, is that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s fairs, maybe the most important elements that would determine the value of the objects and the value of artistic production were the geographic circumstances related to the artists’ references (Chin Davidson, 2010). Is this still a problem that should be taken into consideration today? At a time where reports and studies show that the art world remains one of the systems that present the higher levels of gender and nationality discrimination, it could be argued that the growing number of international art fairs all over the globe and the representation of artists from even the most distant lands, is a proof that slow steps have been taken towards the opposite direction, in an effort to leave behind the strong racial discrimination of the institution.

Regarding now the second development, the vanity of artworks: the fine arts became a weapon against the commodification of almost every object at art exhibitions and fairs (Chin Davidson, 2010). During the fairs of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and even until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the fine art objects of a special status – due to the themes and the techniques that they would present -, were exhibited in separate rooms and competitions, in locations that set them fully apart from artworks of ethnography or works of craft, but they would still physically be part of the world fair. As it can be noticed in Walter Benjamin’s work, this separation was requested mainly from the artists as “they refused to exhibit their work alongside that of manufacturers” (Kujawski, 2011). This separation, led for many years in the misconception that to exhibit a work that is for sale, one puts the artwork in the position of the artisan class of the shopkeepers, reducing its cultural and financial value, and also had a result an autonomy of art that would even lead to its detachment from everyday life (Chin Davidson, 2010). Especially referring to this concept of autonomy of art, Peter Bürger would argue that “only after art, in the nineteenth-century Aestheticism has altogether detached itself from the praxis of life can the

aesthetic develop “purely” (Bürger, 2004: 22). Eventually and based on that idea, this second development –the vanity of artworks, meets the first development – the value of things-, establishing the investment into a new form of cultural capital, which would allow the detachment of fine arts from crude money of the commodity exchange. And for many years, as Rolf Tiedemann would argue, “the majority of Marxist art theorists explain culture as the mere reflection of economic development...” (Tiedemann, 1988), bringing us back to what has been mentioned above, regarding the factors that formed the value of things.

It could be said that throughout the past two centuries, the fairs have been of a special importance to an aesthetic that could be presented through works antithetical to everything industrial and primitive (Chin Davidson, 2010). With a past of strong nationalist character, the artistic innovation and cultural synthesis of the fairs, has only recently started to be addressed in a more critical way, allowing the international art fair to function as what would Walter Benjamin call “a dialectical standstill”, showcasing the connections between the notions of imperialism and globalization, perhaps the most important elements –to be kept and fought- of what we consider international art fair.

At this point, it would be interesting to introduce the notion of the art fair as a cultural third place. Ray Oldenburg and Dennis Brissett presented the concept of the “third place” as the development of open and hybrid spaces that “provide enabling, not escapist, experiences for their inhabitants. They are a forum for “play” in a society interfused with a stubborn commitment to work and purposiveness...” (Oldenburg and Brissett, 1989: 272). Such places present the tendency of moving away from any elitist vision of culture by seeking to interconnect every form of it, from the sacred to the profane. Under this description, the theory of Raphael Besson will be used, according to whom, a new category of “third places” is about to emerge, the one of “cultural third places”, which find their positioning at the heart of cultures and knowledge, while being positioned between lofty cultural institutions and on-the-ground residents (Besson, 2018). Whether the cultural third places in general manage to embed socially both knowledge and culture and to what extent they this combination will improve the mechanisms of production and distribution of knowledge, is still under question (Besson, 2018). But if we accept that the cultural



third places aim to promote a culture of experimentation, staging and coproduction of knowledge and cultures, then it could be argued that art fairs, should be included in the concept of cultural third places, as those elements are some of the most important parts of the international art fair model, and will be also discussed on the following sub-chapters, under a closer examination of the political and social character of this institution.

### **3.2 Art fairs in the form of political and social mediation**

After having discussed the historical evolution of the institution of the art fair and after taking a closer look at the socio-political framework in which the fairs have been developed, it is important to extend further the research on the different aspects of contemporary art fairs, and especially under the notion of the international art fairs. On the following chapter, there will be a detailed discussion on the interaction between art fairs and various aspects of contemporary societies, in political and social terms, while at the same time there will be an analysis on how the above interaction has been reflected in the art market.

It is important to mention that in most of the cases the discussed interaction comes through different processes of mediation. Even though later on this chapter a more detailed explanation will follow regarding the mediation in contemporary art, what can be mentioned at this point, is that for the purposes of this dissertation, while referring to mediation, there is a mention on the communication process that is being developed through different initiatives or through the artworks themselves, between artists, curators or art professionals, and the viewers, or in general, the recipients of the messages and the values that are discussed (Lind, 2013).

#### **Do Art Fairs Get Political?**

As previously analyzed, the institution of the art fair was initiated in an imperialistic environment and in a time when capitalism started making the first steps towards its establishment. In such a context, it seems impossible to see an art fair without being related to politics from its inception. Over the years the way that politics were getting involved into the function of the art fairs (and especially the international ones) has changed, in the same way that society and politics change, art



in its perceptions of the world<sup>29</sup> (Luhmann, 1984) also changes and if art changes, the way it is presented (both institutionally and informally) must change as well. This change is what we will try to examine on the following lines, with a series of examples.

Starting from the probably most obvious example, the one of exhibited political art in the gallery booths at the fairs, it could be argued that especially with the rise of awareness on social and political issues, there has been noticed an increasing movement of works with critical and political context. More and more artists seem to reclaim the advantage and the step that they are given in order to discuss topics that concern not only them, but also a larger number of the contemporary society. And even art fairs, as institutions seem to embrace this change. Quite enlightening are the words of The Armory Show's director, Nicole Berry, who earlier this year claimed: "We're committed to showing critical artwork in a changing cultural climate." (Sayej (b), 2018). This seems to be a really fortunate change and turn, artists have the possibility to reflect through their work on core values of their own societies and of humanity, and this is the main reason why, art has such a significance value and importance to communities (Turner, 2005: 18). The way in which each artist decides to reflect (and sometimes act upon) on social and political phenomena may vary, as some might create within the context of cynicism, others within the context of despair, while it could be suggested that the majority of the artists that decide to produce works of activism<sup>30</sup> produce an art of resistance (Turner, 2005: 18; Crimmin, 2014: 4). Like that, the artists in the place of mediators, manage to create works of different dynamics, that have the capacity to discuss and protest over neo-colonialism, sexual exploitation, social and political injustice, war, violence, racism and more.

Some examples of such works presented in art fairs could be explored, such as in the Art Basel Hong Kong of 2015. One of the creations presented was by Kacey

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<sup>29</sup> According to Niklas Luhmann, art – as science, economy, and law – is a social system dependent from all others. Only art has the role of offering perceptions of the world as it is (1984).

<sup>30</sup> "Art connects art and activism. It focuses on how art in its multiple forms can embrace political intention, or how political action can become creative, poetic, sensorial. Activism looks for new ways of political intervention, open up new forms of disobedience and action that move beyond traditional paradigms of activism" [activism.online, *What is activism for?* Retrieved from: <http://activism.online/what-is-activism/> (last accessed in August 8, 2018)]

Wong<sup>31</sup>, a series titled *Black cop* (2015) (see figure 2). Consisting of wax miniature sculptures, the series visually translated the abuse of power that was noticed during the heavy demonstrations that took place in Hong Kong the same year<sup>32</sup> (Joseph, 2015).



Figure 2  
Kacey Wong (Hong Kong, 1970)  
*Black Cop* (2015)  
Wax Sculptures  
Variable Dimensions  
Black Cop Candle Series  
Courtesy of Kacey Wong

According to the artist:

“I created this candle in the form of a policeman holding a stick, and you can light it up so the fire actually melts the form away and transforms into light. So it’s like a transformation through destruction.” (Wong, 2015)

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<sup>31</sup> Kacey Wong was one of the numerous artists that joined the student-led ‘Occupy Movement’, with activists blockaded major roads for 79 days, demanding the communist leaders of China to allow a fully democratic election (Joseph, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> In 2014 big demonstrations took the streets of Hong Kong, organized by pro-democracy activists. One year later, the rallies returned with more than 13,000 people getting on the streets. The protracted occupations, have been the most significant populist challenge to China’s communist leaders since the demonstrations of 1989 in Tiananmen Square. There was a large police presence that later led to violent clashes with the unarmed protesters [bbc.com, (2015), *Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters return to the streets*, BBC News, Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-31079840> (last accessed in August 8, 2018)]

These incidents inspired a large number of artists who showed their works during Art Basel Hong Kong the same year, agreeing with Wong’s view that “Art is just a tool to express the spirit of yearning for freedom. And that is what we are being deprived of.” (2015). It is within the first scale of Wong’s answer and the notion of Social Sculpture, as it was presented by Joseph Beuys<sup>33</sup> and according to which life should be faced as a social sculpture that we should all help to shape (Tate, 2018), that artists from all over the world seem to find meaning, with more and more political works being exposed in prestigious fairs and gallery’s booths. Again, during Art Basel Hong Kong, but in this year’s edition, three of the members of Guerilla Girls<sup>34</sup>(see figure 3), that used the pseudonyms “Frida Kahlo”, “Kathe Kollwitz” and “Zubeida Agha”, made their appearance on the first days of the fair discussing the representation and the biases against women and minorities in the art market (Tsui, 2018).



Figure 3  
Guerilla Girls (1985)  
*Women Get Resentful* (2018)  
Installation View  
Courtesy of Guerilla Girls

<sup>33</sup> “Social sculpture is a term coined by the German artist Joseph Beuys (1921 – 1986) through a series of public lectures in the early 1970s in America, which he named “Energy Plan for the Western Man”. The term social sculpture was directed at a kind of artwork that would take place in the social realm, and, in order to be complete, would need social engagement and the participation of an audience (Kuoni, 1990). Beuys believed that as spectators became participants, the catalysis of social sculpture would lead to a transformation of society through the release of popular creativity” (Santos, 2018).

<sup>34</sup> Guerilla Girls is a feminist artist group founded in New York I 1985, having had more than 55 members throughout the years, wearing always gorilla masks in order to disguise their identity –their skin of color or age-, in order to avoid distracting people from their arguments (Tsui, 2018).

During the protest, they showed the shocking statistics according to which 90% of the one hundred and sixty-five artists represented in the fair were white men. According to the self-named “Frida Kahlo”, one of the founding members of the group, “When you point out things that people don’t want to hear, it immediately draws comments like, ‘Oh, you are so negative’ or ‘What a bunch of complainers’”, comments that show quite clear the way in which even today’s societies react to disturbing statistics and old traditions (Tsui, 2018). There are many more examples that could be listed, including Richard Mosse’s large-scale photograph from his series *Heat Maps* (2016) (see figure 4), depicting the Tel al-Sarhoun refugee camp in Lebanon.



Figure 4  
Richard Mosse (Kilkenny, 1980)  
*Tel Sarhoun Camp, Lebanon* (2017)  
Photography  
120 x 305 cm  
Heat Maps Series  
Courtesy of Richard Mosse

This specific camp, a little after the photo was taken suffered a devastating fire. The listing of political works presented in Art Fairs could keep growing for many more pages, but for the purposes of this dissertation, there will be one more and last example used, the one of the Brooklyn artist, Cynthia Daignault and her participation at this year’s Armory Show. In her series *Matrix* (2017) (see figure 5), the artist painted twelve portraits of the current president of the US, Donald Trump Jr., being all the images taken from American newspaper front pages, with diverse and conflicted headlines, always depending on the political direction that every newspaper follows.



Figure 5  
Cynthia Daignault (Maryland, 1978)  
*Matrix* (2017)  
Oil on Linen  
28 x 30 cm / painting  
Matrix Series  
Courtesy of The Capital Gallery

This diversity and divide, was what Daignault wanted to point out through her work, showing that “[...] the media plays on reporting on truth proves that newspapers may be a truth industry, but it’s also a business at the same time.” (Sayej (b), 2018).

Many people and especially art dealers would argue that political art is not the most sellable kind of art<sup>35</sup>, but what is important at this point, is that there is now this space for uncensored expression, even in an institution that is more addressed towards financial profit, like art fairs. Exceptions are always made –as it will be discovered on a later stage of the dissertation-, but we are referring to the general movement that is now noticed.

The political works are only the most obvious and least harmful political expression of art fairs. For more disturbing cases, maybe the big financial and political scandal of the “Panama Papers<sup>36</sup>” can be brought in mind, that among many other sectors, shook also the art world. The reason why this happened, was that among the names that surfaced, some of the most important key players of the contemporary art world were included, that through the past years have also formed the new generation of art fairs. Such names were the prestigious collector Ella

<sup>35</sup> Using the words of the Levin Art Group’s Director, Todd Levin: “In the majority of cases, artwork that is overtly political does not sell at the same price level when compared to artwork that reveals its point of view in a more subtle manner.” (Halperin, 2017)

<sup>36</sup> The Panama Papers was a leak of 11.5m files from the database of the fourth biggest law firm worldwide, the Mossack Fonseca, revealing a long list of world known people –from national leaders to lawyers and art professionals- who had been using offshore tax havens (Harding, 2016)



Fontanals-Cisneros, the publisher of the art magazine *Blouin Artinfo*, Louise Blouin, the art dealers Dominique Levy and David Nahmad, the Director of the auction Chen Dongsheng, the Russian oligarch and art patron Dmitry Rybolovlev (Cascone, 2016). The above are only a small sample of the names that have been included in the long list of people from the art world involved in the scandal, and in a further inspection, we could see that all of them, have been key players of first line art fairs<sup>37</sup>, like Art Basel Miami with which Ella Fontanals-Cisneros has collaborated for exhibitions conceived and presented for the purposes of the fair (Angeleti, 2018) or Dominique Levy, whose activities with her gallery Levy Gorvy, have been related to the most prestigious art fairs worldwide since 2006<sup>38</sup>. The example of Panama Papers is one of the latest similar scandals, as only in 2014, Credit Suisse<sup>39</sup>, a leading financial services company, pled guilty to facilitating tax dodging while sending her own personnel to Art Basel Miami, in order to recruit art patrons into conspiring tax invasion (Davis, 2010).

Continuing on the political context of an art fair, it might be useful now to focus on its host city. The financial effect of art fairs comes way beyond the financial revenue that art dealers and artists get from the sale of the artworks, reaching bigger scale outcomes that can even alter the character of a city. This is the reason why so many cities urge to host such an international event (Jennings, 2017). For even a few days – depending on the duration of the art fair -, the event becomes the pulse of the city that is about to welcome a big number of creatively influential people, that will give their own personal touch to a big number of art related events, such as talks, satellite fairs and parties (Delsalle, 2016). And leaving aside the fact that all these visitors, along with the large number of art dealers, galleries' staff and artists, will have a significant impact on the financial status of the city for the given period of time and especially for all local businesses that benefit from tourism, the outcome is

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<sup>37</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, when we mention 'first line art fairs', we are referring to established Institutions, that have the participation of top-tier galleries and artists, a following of strong curators, art professionals, art patrons and collectors, and that have strong collaborations and partnerships with strong institutions and enterprises. As examples, we could use Art Basel, The Armory Show, Frieze and more.

<sup>38</sup> The gallery Levy Gorvy has been an active participant of –among others- The Armory Show, Art Basel, Art Basel Hong Kong, Expo Chicago, Frieze London and New York and many more [levygorvy.com, *Art Fairs*, Retrieved from: <https://www.levygorvy.com/art-fairs/> (last accessed in August 8, 2018)].

<sup>39</sup> Credit Suisse, was one of the top clients of Mossack Fonseca, the law firm associated with the Panama Papers scandal (Davis, 2016).

more important as it is a clear opportunity for a total rebrand of the city, and a pinnacle for cultural stimulus and progression (Jennings, 2017). And in case this does not seem important enough for big art capitals like London and New York, it could be argued that even in those cities the impact is still important by the use of one specific example; London's Art Week. The week that comes on the same dates as Frieze London, gives the chance to the most prestigious institutions and museums of the city to host momentous exhibitions giving an extra hype to the already vibrant artistic scene (Jennings, 2017). It was only in 2017, that on the same dates with Frieze London, the Barbican Centre, one of the hyper-urban spots of the United Kingdom's capital, inaugurated its exhibition with works of Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Tate Britain presented works of the English sculptor Rachel Whiteread, events that were designed to attract universal attention<sup>40</sup> (Jennings, 2017). In smaller cities, the events that might try to profit from the presence of the international and specialized audiences who visits the art fairs might not be as prestigious as the above mentioned, but in any case, these can be a good example for the discussed point.

In most cases, art fairs can become a profile maker for a city, mainly for a number of reasons that have been presented above, along with the fact that they provide the best services to the participants and collectors that visit the fair, by engaging spaces and local professionals that can demonstrate the best cultural, educational and art aspects of a city. Considering now that all those events have a limited duration to 3-6 days (depending on the duration of the fair), it can be argued that in many cases, this newly built profile, has nothing to do with the actual image that a city presents on its daily basis. In order to get a better understanding of this idea, the example of Russia will be used, a country that has been characterized as a murderously difficult place to be an independent journalist or an activist artist (Rosenberg, 2016). It was only in 2016 when PEN America released a report of forty-four pages titled *Discourse in Danger: Attacks on Free Expression in Putin's Russia* (2016), according to which works of art (from literature works, to music and theatre) that do not follow the line of the government will face Russia's numerous laws on expression that often "impose stark limits to fundamental human rights" (PEN

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<sup>40</sup> The two above shows that were used as examples had a longer duration than the one of the fair but the fact that the inauguration in both cases, took place at the same days with Frieze London 2017, does not seem to be a simple coincidence.

America, 2016: 25)<sup>41</sup>. The situation is the same for contemporary artists. Following the line that “In Russia, either be brave or be silenced” (Igor Tsukanov cited by Cocks, 2017), visual and performing artists risk their lives and future, as even though they might escape death, most probably they will be sent in prisons with the least human conditions and face the disapproval of the majority of the population that has limited knowledge in contemporary arts (Cocks, 2017). A quite famous example that can be mentioned, is the activist feminist group “Pussy Riot”, whose members have been imprisoned several times after public performances-demonstrations in different cities of Russia. And while this problematic situation still exists, there is an international contemporary art fair, the Cosmoscw, whose goal is to “bring together both Russian and international collectors, galleries and artists [...] representing fifty-four Russian and international galleries and welcoming nearly 19,000 guests” (Cosmoscw, 2018). But as Russian art often focuses on post-Soviet images, the displayed works at the art fair seem not be focused on political statements, as this is a demand that seems to have passed (Drobinina, 2017). More than half of the participating galleries come from US, Europe and Middle East (from 55Bellechasse Gallery from Paris to Art Select from Bahrain and Re:collection by Crosby Studios of New York) while the partners of the fair vary from Qatar Airways<sup>42</sup> to Credit Suisse. What can be pointed out after having had an overview of the difficulties that artists face in Russia, and the beautified image that the fair’s official page and media coverage present while discussing the Cosmoscw, is that at this point, it is understandable that there is not only an effort to enhance the fair’s attractiveness, but the city’s also.

It can be argued that examples like this, do not represent the majority of the cases where an art fair enhances a city’s or country’s profile, as of course extreme situations like the ones related to Russia could be identified in a quite small number of countries, and in an even smaller number of countries that host art fairs. But this is another perspective and point that should also be addressed more critically and more often before trusting the positive political and social agenda that institutions present.

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<sup>41</sup> PEN America, (2016), *Discourse in Danger: Attacks on Free Expression in Putin’s Russia*, Retrieved from: [https://pen.org/sites/default/files/PEN\\_Discourse\\_In\\_Danger\\_Russia\\_web.pdf](https://pen.org/sites/default/files/PEN_Discourse_In_Danger_Russia_web.pdf) (last accessed in August 30, 2018)

<sup>42</sup> This partnership can be argued that is the result of the Qatar Russia 2018 year of Culture, that aims to strengthen the relations between the State of Qatar and the Russian Federation (Qatar Russia, 2018)



## **Social mediation through educational and non-profit initiatives**

If we try now to discuss what exactly contemporary art is, it will be noticed that it is not closely related only to what is political, but also to what is social. To be more precise, as Boris Groys would argue, being contemporary is associated with being immediately present. Within this context, contemporary art is authentic in the sense that it captures and expresses “the presence of the present in a way that is radically uncorrupted by past traditions or strategies aiming at success in the future” (Groys, 2009). Like that, artistic expressions with a more social context should be included and presented in any institution, from gallery and museums, to art fairs and biennales, not only through the art works but also through other initiatives from the organizers. We will try to explore this function of the art fairs, using some examples of parallel programs – usually framed as mediation or educational programs - of some of the prestigious international art fairs.

This timeline can start by taking a closer look at a number of initiatives produced from Frieze New York. Frieze is one of the art fairs that run one of the most extensive non-profit platforms, under The Frieze Education<sup>43</sup>, an initiative that runs annually from October through June (Frieze, 2016). Specifically talking about their actions throughout 2016<sup>44</sup>, a large number of workshops, tours of artists’ studios, galleries, museums and the fair itself were specially organized for people of all ages, with a special focus on students<sup>45</sup>. For that reason, a special platform was created as an effort to engage the young visitors with what they encountered, taking the role of the mediator that would be able to present new ideas and creative thoughts to the participants. Like that, especially the young creators would have the chance to reflect on what they know and what they have learnt through their education, in relation to the actual image of the current contemporary art scene (Frieze, 2016). Within Frieze Education one could find also Frieze Teen, an initiative that would engage mainly

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<sup>43</sup> Frieze Education is sponsored from Deutsche Bank [(db.com, *Deutsche Bank sponsors Frieze Art Fair Education Space*, Retrieved from: <https://www.db.com/cr/en/concrete-deutsche-bank-sponsors-frieze-art-fair-education-space.htm> (last accessed in August 10, 2018)] Later on this chapter, we will further develop the interesting relation between art institutions (in our case the art fairs), with their sponsors.

<sup>44</sup> The program is one of the integral parts of each year’s edition, but we chose to use the example of 2016, due to the detailed program and sources that can be found online.

<sup>45</sup> frieze.com, *2016 Education Program*, Retrieved from: <https://frieze.com/fair-programme/2016-education-program> (last accessed in August 10, 2018)

with the younger ages of the fair's usual visitors. Frieze Teens, would host workshops with major artists and cultural organizations across New York, portraying like that the journey of an artwork from its creation to its first exhibition, providing knowledge and inner sights to the young participants, managing to enhance their creativity and broaden their horizons. The selection of the students who participate at Frieze Teens, is made by high school professors, who are asked to choose nominate the "promising high school students with an interest in the arts" (Frieze, 2018)<sup>46</sup> Among the participant artists there were: TJ Wilcox and Jessi Reaves while some of the visited spaces were Dieu Donné, Bridget Donahue Gallery, Materials for the Arts, MoMA PS1, Project Projects and White Columns<sup>47</sup>. The tangible output of this initiative was the Youth Guide to the fair, an insider's guide to the fair, and the creation of a route for the volunteers' tours during Frieze New York. The most important though and what we should reflect on, is the intangible result of Frieze Education and Frieze Teens. According to the official statements from the fair, these initiatives aim to introduce the participants to the art world and mainly behind its scenes, they aim for a deeper approach and understanding that will raise questions and will create a supportive community for the participants, while they are opening up career opportunities in the arts (Frieze, 2018) At this point, the given information on whether the above aims have had the desired result are not available to the public, but what can be discussed is the purpose itself. In the years that art mediation has become a vibrant field, as it left aside old practices and prejudices, and aroused strong questions on the importance of education within the creative process and industry (Manifesta, 2014)<sup>48</sup>, every big institution needs to act as a mediator. By taking this role, it needs to be there for building bridges and bringing different audiences together, aiming on an exchange of knowledge and that will open a meaningful cultural dialogue, which is consisted of the different opinions, based on what the viewers see and comprehend from each work, and what were the aims of the creators (manifesta.org, 2014)<sup>49</sup>. If the above is taken into consideration, it could be stated that the initiatives of Frieze Education get close -through their previously described purposes-, to what art

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<sup>46</sup> Frieze, *Frieze Press Release 2018*, Retrieved from: (last accessed in August 10)

<sup>47</sup> frieze.com, *2016 Education Program*, Retrieved from: <https://frieze.com/fair-programme/2016-education-program> (last accessed in August 10, 2018)

<sup>48</sup> manifesta.org, *Manifesta Art Mediation*, Retrieved from: <https://manifesta.org/network/manifesta-art-mediation/> (last accessed in August 10, 2018)

<sup>49</sup> manifesta.org, (2014), *What is art-mediation?*, Retrieved from: <http://m10.manifesta.org/en/education/art-mediation/> (last accessed in August 10, 2018)

mediation aims for. Through the big number of workshops, talks and guided visits one could attend in the fair's yearlong non-profit schedule, different audiences are brought together to reflect on the works and on any presented topics.

Within the same context one more example will be examined, the one of Art Basel. Art Basel, as previously mentioned is one of the first art fairs that formed the image of international art fairs to what we know today. In the same way, it has formed and created a template on the educational and non-profit activities and programs that other art fairs follow. In all its host cities (Basel, Miami and Hong Kong), the visitors can choose from a variety of initiatives for all ages. One of these, is the Junior Art Hub in Art Basel Hong Kong, which is supported by UBS<sup>50</sup>. The Junior Art Hub includes tours for children above the age of 3, who are later asked to “create their own masterpieces using works from the UBS Art Collection as inspiration” (Art Basel, 2018)<sup>51</sup>. Taking now into consideration studies that associate arts and children development, according to which children that are exposed to arts present greater historical empathy, a better educational memory and advanced critical thinking skills (Greene, Kisida and Bowen, 2014), the importance of such initiatives can be easily understood. At the same time, Art Basel in collaboration with Kickstarter, has created the “Crowdfunding Initiative”, which generates support for selected projects with noncommercial intent and within the context of visual arts. Through the Crowdfunding Initiative, the selected projects –including a range of art and education-related programs like artists' residencies, public installations, education programs-, get visibility and support, while at the same time they provide a platform for artists – emerging and established- to expand their knowledge and practice (Dundon, 2018). The juries for the selection of the project are: Hammad Nasar –curator and writer-, Glenn Phillips –curator and head of Modern and Contemporary Collections at Getty Research Institute- and Mari Spirito –Executive Director and Curator at Protocinema and Alt Art Space- (Kickstarter, 2018)<sup>52</sup>. This project as described above, and the diversity of nationalities, cultures and ideas that are presented, can bring in mind the

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<sup>50</sup> UBS Group AG/UBS Group SA/UBS Group Inc. (“UBS”) is a public, global investment bank, providing financial services in over than 50 countries, incorporated under the laws of Switzerland [ubs.com, *Information on UBS*, Retrieved from: <https://www.ubs.com/global/en/legalinfo2/infoonubs.html> (last accessed in August 10, 2018)].

<sup>51</sup> Artbasel.com, *UBS/Junior Art Hub*, Retrieved from: <https://www.artbasel.com/events/detail/4577/UBS-Junior-Art-Hub> (last accessed in August 10, 2018)

<sup>52</sup> kickstarter.com, *Art Basel*, Retrieved from: <https://www.kickstarter.com/pages/artbasel> (last accessed in August 10, 2018)

words of Caroline Turner while talking about art for social change and according to whom “all dynamic cultures draw on ideas from other cultures. Art and creative practice cannot be isolated, locked into a set of traditions or frozen in time (Turner, 2005). So, as an initiative that brings together projects and people from all over the world, the idea behind Crowdfunding Initiative shows that its team has a clear understanding on the importance of cultural exchange, and that it is time to escape the old traditions that do not relate with the contemporary times we are living. It could be argued that the views of Turner have even more concrete bases in another initiative that Art Basel has inaugurated, like Art Basel Cities, that started only two years ago, aiming to create cultural events and programs throughout the year in selected cities. This happens through a multi-year partnership that tries to provide through a curated and engaging program the opportunity to the art world to discover new cities through the lenses of art (Dundon, 2018).

The last example for the purposes of this chapter will be related to The Armory Show, another art fair of international importance. The Armory Show, embracing the continuous education –especially on art related topics- has presented The Armory Live, which is “a year-round program of conversations highlighting influential members of the international art community- hosted at the fair, online and throughout New York City” (The Armory Show, 2017)<sup>53</sup>. So far, in the talks they have participated academics –like Kenneth White who is a professor at the Faculty of Curatorial Studies at the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program-, collectors –like Pulane Kingston-, curators –like Matthew Israel, who is curator at large in Artsy- (The Armory Show, 2017)<sup>54</sup>, artists and many more art professionals, who through their discussions, do not only try to reflect on the importance and the changes of the art world and the art market, but also prove that the art fair has the potential of being an institution of the future, not only due to its financial aspects, but mainly due to the educational and cultural experience that it can be for the visitors (Genocchio, 2017).

The social character that an art fair as an institution has, is not limited only to what is related with its educational purposes and to the activities related to the

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<sup>53</sup> thearmoryshow.com, *Armory Live*, Retrieved from: <https://www.thearmoryshow.com/armory-live> (last accessed in August 10, 2018)

<sup>54</sup> thearmoryshow.com, *Armory Live*, Retrieved from: <https://www.thearmoryshow.com/armory-live> (last accessed in August 10, 2018)

visitors. In a previous point, there was a brief mention to the Crowdfunding Initiative, about the possible art residencies that Art Basel offers through its platform. These residencies are of great importance for a number of artists that want to establish or remain on the first line of the art market. This aspect of the social mediation that the art fairs offer, will be discussed in a more detailed structure on the following subchapter, shedding light to a part that for many people remains unknown.

### **Art Fairs as a Platform for Young and Emerging Artists**

While detailed discussions could take place on the different means art fairs are beneficial for established artists, who through their participation manage to maintain their reputation, expand their collectors' lists and even reserve new shows, at this subchapter there will be a focus on the various ways that art fairs became a platform for the emerging artists who hope to make the most out of their fair participations and manage to establish themselves in the art world. The suggestions that will follow, will be based on two different theories: (1) the cultural branding, a term that was introduced in 2004 by the marketing theorist Douglas B. Holt and (2) art for social change, as this has been discussed by a large number of artists, academics and art professionals, like Tania Bruguera, Alistair Hudson and Boris Groys. For the second suggestion, the discussion will be based on the fact that young and emerging artists have an information-related practice, closely connected to social and political happenings (Mason and Robinson, 2010). Both topics will be addressed with the use of examples related to international, contemporary art fairs, in an attempt to prove our point, that art fairs can be beneficial for emerging artists.

Starting from the approach of the cultural branding, it is essential to mention that what will be discussed and presented, is the process of transferring meaning from artists to collectors/appreciators (Lee, 2016). Artists can be referred as brands, in the way that they become a symbol and a mediator with a "culturally-embedded meaning" (Muñiz, Norris, and Fine 2014), almost taking the place of a "performer of, container of, an identity of myth" (Holt, 2004: 14). Here, while making a connection to the second point – art for social change, which will later be discussed in detail- it can be suggested that artists through their works reflect society, as they transfer the cultural meaning of the world in their work (Lee, 2016). Eventually, this can present artists as an equivalent of cultural brands in terms of "traffic[king] in meaning and

idea” (Lee, 2016). As Holt would initially suggest, the term ‘cultural branding’ refers to a strategic model of comprehending cultural codes of the contemporary society, which are the most important elements for turning a brand –in our case an artist- into a cultural icon (Holt, 2004: 35). Within this context, the cultural branding model, includes also the collective activities for branding cultural brands by intermediaries in the art world, between artists and consumers. These activities are formed in a complex structure, as the different intermediaries and the artists, do not have a specified form of interaction and collaboration, that as a result has the creation of either strong relationships – in the cases of regular interaction – or weak relationships – in the cases of irregular interaction- among them (Lee, 2016). In both cases, the emerging artists as mediators carrying a culturally-embedded meaning, manage through their works to present the notions and the ideas that they wish, approaching in an intellectual level their audience.

At this point, it should be mentioned once more that the art world is hierarchically organized, and according to Bourdieu “there is the principle of legitimacy corresponding to ‘bourgeois’ taste and to the consecration bestowed by the dominant fractions of the dominant class.” (1983: 51), and therefore the hierarchical structure of the art world becomes explicit through the accumulation of unbalanced acceptances in such a process (Lee, 2016). As for the emerging artists, what has been summarized above, shows the various steps that these artists have to follow in order to establish their names and practice. They also need to go through the hierarchical trajectory of the art world, while always creating relationships with intermediaries<sup>55</sup> – that in this case are art dealers, galleries, art critics, museums, and auction houses - in order to become distinguished (Lee, 2016). But art fairs, as an intermediary, have changed the way emerging artists approach their audience.

The past years there has been noticed a new movement towards the introduction of emerging artists to the market, that is generally based either on especially dedicated spaces into the fairs, either on special prizes addressed only to young practitioners. And for that the example of Frieze London could be used. Frieze London is one of the numerous art fairs that dedicate special sections to emerging artists, like its section “Focus”, which is designed for emerging galleries. In 2015, only galleries formed

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<sup>55</sup> According to Nathalie Heinich the role of the intermediaries is getting an increasing power in the contemporary art market (Heinich, 2012).



after 2003 were eligible to apply for one of the booths in this section, and these galleries, with their own turn, were asked to present artworks by young and emerging artists, either in the form of solo or group exhibitions (Lee, 2016).

Additionally, it is a common thing for international art fairs, in an effort to showcase a strong social character, like Art Dubai with examples that will be examined in detail in the following chapter, to introduce non-profit activities. These activities can take place not only during the limited number of days that the art fair is taking place, but also throughout the year. Again, in the case of Frieze London, another initiative that has been introduced is the Frieze Projects. The Frieze Projects aims to introduce approximately seven young and emerging artists to the public, by commissioning two site-specific works<sup>56</sup> that intervene and interact with the structures of the art fair, and come along with the consultation of the senior curator (Lee, 2016). This provided interaction of emerging artists with senior curators, creates an interesting dialogue between art professionals of different generations, engaged with different mediums and social purposes, who aim on engaging with their surroundings and create a bridge between the art work and the viewers. Another example, this time with a focus on the East, comes from Art Fair Tokyo, Japan's biggest and oldest art fair (Tokyo Art Fair, 2018). For the first time this year, Art Fair Tokyo inaugurated a new section called "Future Artists Tokyo-Switch Room", which featured works from students of six art universities (Lau (a), 2018). The section that has been characterized and promoted as "an experiment meant to create circuits that emit new light by connecting future culture-bearers scattered around Tokyo" (Lau (b), 2018), brought together student curators and student artists in twelve diverse works, juxtaposing them against each other aiming to create an open discussion on the future of Japanese art and creation (Lau (b), 2018).

The above three examples can give us a good understanding of the potentials that these artists get once they manage to get accepted within the gates of such institution. They get to expose their works in events that get visited by hundreds to thousands of people, while getting the attention from important people of the art world, as private or institutional collectors, art critics and journalists, art dealers, artists and art lovers. Art fairs also manage to instruct the insiders of the art world on how to comprehend the works not only of well-established artists but mainly young and emerging ones.

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<sup>56</sup> Frieze Projects is run by Frieze Foundation, that is also the Foundation organizing the institutions' commissions for the young artists (Lee, 2016).

This happens through series of educational activities and programs that are happening along with the actual fair, and that can provide the potential collectors with the necessary knowledge on how to understand and view works of art (Lee, 2016). Additionally, it is quite a common practice for the art fairs to provide information about presented commissioned works, which lately tend to introduce mainly emerging artists (see Frieze Projects).

It is important to comprehend that cultural knowledge is crucial in order to get to the deeper meaning of contemporary art. Getting now back to our initial approach, with the cultural branding and the different levels of intermediaries, just like art dealers, that are in charge of introducing either complex or brand new works of art and artists to the wider audience, or like the curators that through their approaches try to educate the world on everything new and contemporary art, it can be noticed that the audience is indirectly instructed into the deeper appreciation of emerging artists (Lee, 2016). But art fairs in general engage with every intermediary individually, and that, as a result has a big impact on the art market – as it will be examined on the following subchapter-. Using once again the example of Frieze London, it could be argued that through this right interaction with all the important elements of the art world, it did manage to consolidate its position and become one of the ‘gatekeepers’<sup>57</sup> in the contemporary arts field (Lee, 2016). The consequence of that is that it automatically contributes to the strengthening of the artistic identity of every artist participating in it. Put differently, the art fairs, especially the big and established ones, contribute to framing the value and interpretation of emerging contemporary artists and create like that new cultural brands. What has not mentioned here, is that getting in the art fairs, and especially the big ones that have been characterized as ‘gatekeepers’ previously, is a procedure that can be quite difficult and tricky, for reasons that will be discussed on a following stage. So, everything discussed so far, relates to the emerging artists that manage to exhibit the works to fairs, after getting the final approval from the committee of each fair.

The selection, or in better words one of the several reasons that affect the final decision and the selection of the art fair committee is closely related to the portfolio of

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<sup>57</sup> The term ‘gatekeepers’ here can be used either in the traditional sense of the word (an attendant employed to control who goes through the gate), or it can take the meaning of the taste-makers (Lee 2016).



each artist-applicant<sup>58</sup>. This takes us to the second idea related to this chapter, which is the relation of the art that emerging artists present during their participation in art fairs. In this case, as a starting point will be one of the theories related to emerging artists' practice, which argues that they have an information-driven behavior (Mason and Robinson, 2010). The majority of the young practitioners seem to have completed a formal education in the arts –with at least a bachelor degree- or to have a formal career structure, engaging on building up their personal practice of the arts being fully aware of the social, political and financial framework of their society. This practice is being built through a process during which the artists seek for information, with four individual points introduced for the urge for information: (1) inspiration (2) identification of specific visual elements (3) information of materials and techniques and (4) marketing and career guidance (Mason and Robinson, 2010).

From the four previously mentioned points, it could be argued that the one that urges the majority of artists to look for information, is their need for constant inspiration, which of course could come from many different elements and sources. Arguably, the next point could be the need for information related to materials and techniques. The identification of specific visual elements, -applying mainly to visual artists, and the marketing and career guidance –applying mainly to emerging artists, are the ones that follow. At this point, it is important to suggest that a fifth point that should be included in the list that Mason and Robinson introduced in 2010, and which is the need for accurate and factual information, regarding the current happenings of contemporary societies and the need for information for current trends in the art world. While living in a period where artists get the chance to have a number of different sources of stimulation, and with free access to information through the Internet<sup>59</sup>, the above seems as not such a difficult procedure.

It is exactly this easy access to any kind of information that is slowly leading to the necessary review of traditional orthodoxies of art, helping to bring about an era of artworks inspired and focused not on the aesthetical image of them, but on their utility, and on “the beauty of being useful” (Bruguera, 2011). After being for more than one hundred and fifty years under a somehow colonial conception and

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<sup>58</sup> In this case, we take as a fact that each gallery that applies for an art fair, needs to show examples of the work of the artist/s that they will present in their booth.

<sup>59</sup> As per the research of Mason and Robinson, all the artists that were used as samples of their study seemed to have the Internet as their first source of information, although they claimed that they did not use it only as a source of inspiration, but for a combination of the points that have been presented in the text.

regulation of arts, in a digital era like the one that we are living at the moment, the right trigger can be found that can help the artists, and even more the emerging ones, employ their practice on their own new terms (Hudson, 2016). And as in the cases previously mentioned, where art fairs engage on presenting social and political works, it could be discussed that this is a risk –as such works are not as saleable as decorative ones-, that in many cases emerging artists are more willing to take than established ones. Such acts are of high importance as they manage to encourage artists to create artworks not having as a sole purpose the financial profit, but mainly because their work will become their means of communication with a wider audience, prepared or not to receive this kind of information. Like that, art becomes a tool where people can generate from and find the elements that will help them deal with society, politics and their consequences (Bruguera, 2011).

This idea of Bruguera comes in total opposition to what Walter Benjamin and Guy Debord, would present in their work and according to whom the aestheticization of politics –even in the form of political protest- has negative dimensions as it diverts the attention away from the actual and practical aims of a political protest (Groys, 2014). Art fairs' directors, understanding this change and that art is now less focused on aesthetics, and mainly on the context in which they were conceived, have shown that they make a selection of emerging artists based on different criteria, including the context of their work (Lee, 2016), aiming to create an additional dimension on the institution, not so linked with the financial profit. Once again, there are several examples to prove this point, but in this chapter, examples of young and emerging artists will be used. Starting from this year's Frieze New York, in one of the booths and as one of the numerous critical artworks that the visitors could view, was the one of the young artist Adam Pendleton, a US flag, reading "Black Lives Matter" (same with the title of the work, which is *Black Dada Flag (Black Lives Matter)*, (2015-2018) (see figure 6) and depicting a black man under the shadow of the flag (Sayej (a), 2018).



Figure 6  
 Adam Pendleton (Virginia, 1984)  
*Black Dada Flag (Black Lives Matter)* (2015 - 2018)  
 Digital Print on Polyester  
 Variable Dimensions  
 Black Dada Flag Series  
 Courtesy of Adam Pendleton and PACE Gallery

Another example can be considered another flag, again presented in Frieze New York 2018, the work *Pledge* (2018) (see figure 7) but this time of another young artist, named Hank Willis Thomas, who embroidered more than fifteen thousand stars, that represent the number of people who lost their lives to gun violence in the US from 2017 to 2018 (Sayej (a), 2018).



Figure 7  
 Hank Willis Thomas (New Jersey, 1976)  
*Pledge* (2018)  
 Screenprint on retroreflective vinyl, mounted on Dibond  
 198 x 250 cm  
 Edition of 2  
 Courtesy of Hank Willis Thomas and Jack Shainman Gallery

This general movement towards political artworks has not though changed completely the tolerance that art fairs show to works with such themes, in fear of controversy and negative feedback. Even today many incidents of censorship within international art fairs have been noticed, as for example the incident with the work of Santiago Sierra *Political Prisoners in Contemporary Spain* (2018) (see figure 8), which was taken down from this year's Arco Madrid.



Figure 8  
Santiago Sierra (Madrid, 1966)  
*Political Prisoners in Contemporary Spain* (2018)  
Photography  
34 x 49 cm / photography  
Political Prisoners in Contemporary Series  
Courtesy of Santiago Sierra and Josu Gaston Foronda

The work is a photograph belonging to a series of twenty-four pixelated portraits of imprisoned politicians and activists, including Oriol Junqueras –head of pro-independence party Catalan Republic Left-, and Jordi Cuixart –leader of a separatist group. Both men were imprisoned with pending charges relating to the push for Catalan independence (Harris, 2018). A more extensive reference and discussion regarding the negative aspect of the censorship, that comes as a result of the interesting relation developed between politics and the institution of the art fair, will be developed in our case study of Art Dubai in the following chapter, supported with the necessary examples and bibliography.

### 3.3 International Art Fairs and the International Art Market

On the first part of this chapter, while discussing the main elements of the international art fairs, some of the geographical elements that shape the art fairs as we know them today have been analyzed. Two centuries after the first art fairs, in a

globalized world which has been coined a “global village” (McLuhan, 1964) and, in turn, a world inhabited by “planetary creatures rather than global entities” (Spivak, 2003: 72-73), the contemporary art market is highly territorialized (Quemin, 2013). Cultural globalization has appeared mostly as an increase in transnational exchanges that do not erase national borders or the impact of national units (Quemin, 2013). So how international art fairs have affected the art market? What are the changes that have been noticed and the elements that let us call the international art fairs “the new game changers” in the international art market? Those are questions that will be explored –among others- in the following pages.

Before answering those questions, it would be needed for the better comprehension of what will follow, to have a brief overview of what the art market is. For the aims of this dissertation, rather than making an in-depth analysis of the meanings of the art market, we propose to focus on a selection of important points that became an integral part of the cultural economy and that shaped the art practice and art collecting and that are related to our discussed topics.

Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century the sales of art had started being commercialized. This can be better understood if the directions of the art historian Francis Haskell will be followed, who in his book *Rediscoveries in Art* (1976), developed the theory that works of art, and especially the demand of works of art, is bound up with a number of different factors such as religious, political, nationalist, economic and intellectual ones (Haskell, 1976: 246). And as we already have the presence of a formatted marketplace, all the above-mentioned factors, along with the presented availability of the works, created new flows and trends to the art world. In another one of his works, while referring specifically to *The Market for Italian Art in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century* (1959), Haskell would refer extensively to the economic factors and political situations (mainly the wars that affected South Europe), that brought a number of changes to the way artworks were sold, if in these times of crisis such an investment was even possible (Haskell, 1959: 48). As the years passed and the art market seemed to find a way to stabilize itself in the society, the need for an art price index emerged, which would create the necessary framework and would include all the complex value structures of the art market for the wider consuming public.

Eventually this led to the art market having its own dynamic and evolving within an intellectual discourse grounded in practice and theory of art and tradition of criticism and connoisseurship (Westgarth, 2009).

According to Westgarth, the art market consists of two main market categories: primary and secondary market. Let's take a closer look at each one of them separately, and starting from the primary market. The primary market is the one closely related to the production of an artwork and/or its first sale. It has been linked to evolving art practices and artistic techniques, and it is exactly within the structure of the primary market, that the anonymous market was also created, with artists creating artworks in a form of speculative practice, while trying at the same time to keep a distance from the patrons of each period (Westgarth, 2009). In the vast majority of the art fairs, what has been present is the primary market, as in most of the cases the presented works are being shown for the first time to the public, while many are the cases that gallerists commission works to the artists, especially conceived for each fair.

Going now to the secondary market, there is a reference to the re-selling and collecting of artworks. The secondary market –as noticed- is often articulated in a small number of art capitals<sup>60</sup>, and has as its main focus the emergence of specialist public art auctions, as well as the emergence of the specialist trader and the art dealer (Westgarth, 2009). Here there should be made an important note. The secondary art market has the ability to protect the primary against “infringement by substitute products” enhancing like that one specific category, the one of oligopolistic art markets (Singer, 1988).

This last mention, provides the trigger to notice one more thing: multiple and competitive art markets are rational. This of course depends on the different audience they refer to, but they should all use relevant information when it comes to determining their prices, or in any other important sector of every market, such as authentication processes (Singer and Lynch, 2014). In some cases, these markets have a somehow free entry, with a characteristic art-historical continuity while others are dominated by the elite of international collectors. Every version of the general art

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<sup>60</sup> Such capitals can be considered cities that have the following elements: a) vibrant artist community b) good art school c) a strong commercial sector d) local and international collectors and patrons e) a broad spectrum of public institutions f) an engaged audience g) a strategic spot (Milliard, 2014)

market, is dependent on the frequent and unpredictable changes and of the art establishment in contemporary times.

This really brief explanation and description, and while always keeping in mind that the main object of the dissertation – the art fairs- belong to the primary market, can help us focus one more time on the close relation and dependence that different social systems have, and in this case the art (as a science), social, political and financial ones (Luhmann, 1984). The evolution and the changes that can be noticed in one of those systems, will automatically affect the others, through the communication that is developed within them. In the case of this paper, in direct but mainly indirect ways, the sociopolitical context of the contemporary society manages to affect the financial status of it, with a whole of changes that as a result brought –and most probably will bring also in the future- changes in the way the art world and the art market has been developed. Having the above as the starting and core point of this research, on the following chapters, there will be a focus and development of some of the changes that the political and social domains of the society, brought to the art market.

### **A New Approach on Artworks' Sales**

From its very beginning art was here to serve several functions. From a social function –while addressing problematic aspects of a collective life-, to a personal function –while presenting the subjective ideas of the artists and their hope to communicate with every individual viewer- (Esaak, 2018). Lately though, a new function has been added to the list, the financial one –as art has taken the role of protector of wealth at a time of global financial uncertainty and declining yields (Beeson, 2015). This brought a revolution in the way works are being purchased and most probably, it is one of the main reasons why collectors choose to attend art fairs on a regular basis (Badiali, 2014). What should not be neglected, is that there are simpler reasons for the increase of collectors trusting art fairs, such as the internationalization of art, which is partly due to better and easier communication through the internet, and the falling prices of air travel (Delsalle, 2016). Only in 2015, art fairs appeared to generate an estimate of twelve billion EUR in profits for their



exhibiting galleries, while doing one simple thing<sup>61</sup>: connecting galleries, art dealers, collectors and art professionals that are normally disconnected due to geography<sup>62</sup> (Artsy, 2016)<sup>63</sup>.

In less than a decade the number of art fairs rose by almost 396% (Espasmo, 2016), a fact that has changed the classic art market model, based on which all transaction would take place within gallery spaces, and is steadily establishing the international art fair model and its economic profile (Delsalle, 2016).

In the macro-economic report of TEFAF (The European Fine Art Foundation) of 2014, it is noted that the art market reached its highest ever recorded level of fifty-one billion EUR with 40% of the sales to have been made through art fairs, making them the second largest expenditure generators at 19% of the total in 2014 (TEFAF, 2015)<sup>64</sup>. And if this number alone is not enough, we can take a closer look at how the sales by galleries have increased at art fairs, and point out that in 2010 the sales would reach the 30%, while in 2014 the 40% percentage (Delsalle, 2016). This increase in only the short period of four years might seem small but it is definitely significant and shows that art fairs actually represent a successful business model to distribute art, while still being a strong marketing tool for the galleries, against the constant competition from auction houses (Badiali, 2014). At this point it should be acknowledged, that as the art market has been always characterized by lack of transparency, the reliable data connected to the art fairs and the sales are quite limited (Badiali, 2014). Why has this tool been successful so far? This can be explored while discussing the same fact –the sale of an artwork- from two different perspectives: from the galleries' side and the collectors' side.

Starting from the galleries, art fairs give them the opportunity to bring together their own clients along with their competitors' clients and of course new ones. Through this interaction they do not only have the chance to understand the

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<sup>61</sup> International art fairs have become an integral platform for galleries and artists, as it allows them to showcase their works, make their presence known and sell their works while making connections with the art world's key players (Delsalle, 2016).

<sup>62</sup> In the years between 2011 and 2015, reportedly almost 8 million people have attended international art fairs (artsy.com, (2016), *The Art Market Explained: The Rise of the Art Fair*, Retrieved from: <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-how-art-fairs-expanded-the-contemporary-art-market> (last accessed in August 4, 2018)

<sup>63</sup> artsy.com, (2016), *The Art Market Explained: The Rise of the Art Fair*, Retrieved from: <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-how-art-fairs-expanded-the-contemporary-art-market> (last accessed in August 4, 2018)

<sup>64</sup> TEFAF, (2015), *TEFAF – The Art Market Report 2015*, Retrieved from: <http://tbamf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/TEFAF2015.pdf> (last accessed in August 4, 2018)



collectors' wishes, but also to nurture them and eventually create their own needs. According to the Financial Times, some galleries make up to 70% of their annual turnover at the fairs they choose to participate (Neuendorf, 2016). From the collectors' side, taking into consideration that there has been formed a new generation of wealthy collectors who as Marc Spiegler –Art Basel Director- would comment “are really, really wealthy – but they are really, really busy” (Marc Spiegler cited by Neuendorf, 2016) do not have the time to visit individual galleries. The same collectors prefer visiting one or several art fairs per year, having an efficient and satisfying experience of exploring many galleries at once (Neuendorf, 2016), while taking the time to compare artworks, artists and prices, before proceeding to a new investment<sup>65</sup>. This experience becomes even more enjoyable thanks to key moves from the art fairs. Such moves can be considered the detailed and well-organized schedule that the vast majority of art fairs offer to their visitors, which grants access to the patrons and collectors at specific days and times—according to their importance, and of course the increasing number of side-activities (Badiali, 2014). These side-activities include a large number of events that vary from exclusive dinners and parties, to curated art related events, such as talks, forums, lectures and performances, and have become vital to the art world's social scene (Delsalle, 2016). Many of those events are open also to the general public, something that makes many people feel welcome to the galleries' circuit and bring them closer to the idea of starting their own collection. In Boris Groys words:

“[...]Art fairs, while ostensibly existing to serve art buyers, are now increasingly transformed into public events, attracting a population with little interest to do so. [...] Art becoming a part of mass culture, not as source of individual works to be traded on the art market, but as an exhibition practice, combined with architecture, design, and fashion – just as it was envisaged by the artists of the Bauhaus, the Vkhutemas and others as early as the 1920s” (Groys, 2009).

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<sup>65</sup> Art Basel's director Marc Spiegler would comment that : “...the fairs have done a good job of being a place where you can get an overview of a global market at a moment where the art world is internationalizing constantly.” (Neuendorf, 2016)

This somehow brings back one of the elements of art fairs that has been present even from the 19<sup>th</sup> century as mentioned before: the networking character. Fairs still propose important networking opportunities that a smaller or local gallery, would not be able to provide, within the context of the globalized art market (Delsalle, 2016). And it is within exactly this context that even business-savvy artists want their works to be shown in art fairs and mostly international ones, as much as clients expect their favorite galleries to have a quite active art fair presence (Neuendorf, 2016).

This gains even greater importance when art fairs aim to promote their international dimension. An increasing number of art fairs seek to exhibit a wider range of artists and range of works, from specific regions of the world. For that, several examples can be found, but the one of Singapore Art Fair's founders, Laure d'Hauteville and Pascal Odille will be used (Delsalle, 2016). The last two, aim to build an art fair that will take the place of an active platform for artists from Middle East, North Africa and Southeast Asia, hoping that this will allow them to play the key role in the development of every regional gallery that wants to grow in the market and eventually be successful internationally (Rudolf, 2016). This thematic approach is not a new thing. Many –mainly- European and North American fairs have decided through the years to focus on the East and the emerging scenes of Central Europe, along with the ones of Middle East and Asia –including pioneer art fairs like The Armory Show or Art Paris-, proving that the institution wants to act as a diverse cultural platform that “...welcomes not only established Western artists, but also emerging artists from as close as New York to as far as Cairo or Jeddah.” (Smith, 2016).

Everything mentioned above is an easier procedure for big, international and established art fairs that through the years have managed to create their own identity and strong following. In the cases of younger, local art fairs, or art fairs of a general smaller scale, things seem to be a bit more difficult, especially in countries where the art market is not really advanced, it is quite obvious that they lack experience in the production and organization of such events (Delsalle, 2016). However, what can be noticed is that even these art fairs are gradually gaining their spot in the international art map, by including in their program new initiatives and projects, that focus and reflect on their regional identity, and as previously mentioned while discussing the political undertones of the art fairs, by helping the local economies of their host cities, as they attract a large number of tourists, but also by working with festivals, museums

and other local institutions that are big money spinners (Delsalle, 2016). This provided variety of options is a good thing for the galleries –in terms of locations and the fair’s identity-, as they can choose from a number of sizes and profiles, the fair that best suits them. This selection eventually lets the galleries build their own strategy on how to enter competitively the global art scene.

What can be seen from everything mentioned above, through numbers and examples, are the ways and factors that created a new radically changed image of the art market after the booming of the international art fairs, as a result of social and political changes brought in society. New standards in the ways that artworks are sold have been presented above, coming as an outcome of the way technological evolution, politics, geography and society changed the finance and the way collectors and galleries treated artworks and the art system itself. What is still to be discussed, is whether this new image constitutes of sustainable new art market model and which can be considered the black holes of a model that has not been tested thoroughly over the past years, topics that will be critically addressed on the following sub-chapters.

### **The Collateral Damage of The Art Fair Era**

The quite newly created art ecosystem has presented the positive effects as those have been discussed above, but at the same time has shown also negative effects that should not be ignored.

As many big galleries have managed to grow even bigger thanks to this new international art fair model along with everything that this offers, the internationalization of the art trade has brought smaller galleries on the edge, as they struggle to cover all the expenses that are requested for a fair participation (Neuendorf, 2016). So while big galleries like SCAI The Bathhouse (Tokyo) and ShanghART Gallery (Shanghai) find art fair costs bearable and normal as they aim to compensate it through sales during the days of the fair (Espasmo, 2016), smaller and less known galleries that are already operating on a tight budget, enter a vicious circle while facing difficulties on covering the booth rentals, the shipping and insurance of the works, the accommodation and plane tickets of their staff, while at the same time they do acknowledge that their reputation is on stake among artists, collectors and fellow gallerists (Neuendorf, 2016). In order to obtain a better understanding of the referred costs, a look at the example of 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair can be

taken, which is one the fairs that do not charge per square meter the participants but by the size of the room. So, in this case, a small room at 1-54 Contemporary could cost a minimum of approx. 7,700 EUR a medium room could cost approximately approx. 13,400 EUR and a big room could cost up to approx. 15,500 EUR -the very few exceptions of extra-large rooms, can go up to approx. 20,000 EUR (Tarmy, 2018). Another example, can be the one of Art Basel in Switzerland, as discussed one of the most powerful art fairs worldwide, which charges approx. 350 EUR per square meter for its “Statements” section, and approx. 740 EUR per square meter for its “Galleries” and “Feature” sections, which practically means that a sixty-square-meter booth would cost around 43,000 EUR and a one-hundred-sqaure-meter booth could cost even more than 73,000 EUR (Tarmy, 2018). The booth rental is only the basic cost that every gallery is requested to pay, as additional costs may apply depending on the extra services that each gallery might need<sup>66</sup> (Spiegler, 2018). Consequently, for emerging galleries the art fair participation is a risk that they often need to take in order to sustain their artistically active profile in the art world. The problem though for an emerging gallery willing to take such risk, is that they usually do not present art pieces that cost more than 45,000 EUR, and if the sales do not go as expected, this can be even disastrous for their business (Espasmo, 2016). Thanks to the large number of art fairs around the globe, there is quite an increasing number of art fairs dedicated to smaller and newly established galleries, as well as young contemporary artists (Art Radar Journal, 2015)<sup>67</sup>, but the main concern in those cases, would be if the attendants would be of the same significance, as those who attend the big, annual, international art fairs. If they are, and if more exhibitions –especially in institutions– come out of the participation on the fair/s –even if there have not been marked significant sales–, then a gallery can consider its participation successful (Artsy, 2016)<sup>68</sup>. Keeping that in mind, and while acknowledging the possibility that the success of big galleries at art fairs, comes at the expense of smaller and mid-size galleries that do not have the means to benefit on the same extent, David Zwirner

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<sup>66</sup> Such costs may be the lightning or wall reinforcement, and even the carpeting of the booth (Spiegler, 2018).

<sup>67</sup> Artradarjournal.com, (2015), *Fair-tigued: Are there too many art fairs?*, art radar, Retrieved from: <http://artradarjournal.com/2015/03/27/fair-tigued-are-there-too-many-art-fairs/> (last accessed in August 5, 2018)

<sup>68</sup> artsy.com, (2016), *The Art Market Explained: The Rise of the Art Fair*, Retrieved from: <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-how-art-fairs-expanded-the-contemporary-art-market> (last accessed in August 4, 2018)

suggested that the larger galleries could subsidize the participation of smaller and emerging galleries in big art fairs. This idea was supported by other important art personalities, such as Marc Glimcher, CEO of Pace Gallery, during the New York Times art leaders network conference (Powall, 2018). Is it really though the art fairs' responsibility to provide a platform for dealers to redistribute surplus wealth from larger galleries to smaller ones? This is still quite unclear, especially given the fact that it is quite a new suggestion, which also explains why such initiatives have not yet been confirmed.

Except from the problematic relation of the emerging galleries with the finance of the well-established art fairs, the radical transformation of the art market has created a big problem on traditional art galleries, which have seen their business decline in alarming levels, as the concentration of the majority of art collectors and even loyal buyers, is on the art fairs (Delsalle, 2016). This effect can get also examined through the shifting demographic extends, as due to the different immigration waves that have been noticed lately in the big –for example- European cities which are also art capitals –as London-, the newcomers lack the knowledge of their host city and as they do not necessarily spend a lot of time in discovering individual galleries, they prefer finding works collected in one place, as it happens in the cases of art fairs (Delsalle, 2016). The examples that can be used in order to prove that point vary. From the London based galleries Colnaghi –which shut down after being located in Mayfair for two hundred and fifty years- and Agnew's Gallery – which shut its establishment after one hundred and ninety-five years in the area of Bond Street-, to the reports from the Australian Commercial Galleries Association mentioning that global sales of its galleries had dropped by 25-30% and that 30% of its commercial galleries had closed in recent years (Delsalle, 2016). Also in North America, the image seems quite similar, with reports showing that many San Francisco and Los Angeles based galleries decided to sell their spaces and invest on a stringer online presence. The necessity of more and more art galleries to adjust to the changes and the new standards of the art market is more urgent that ever, as the predictions for the galleries, as we knew them up to date, is quite pessimistic, giving them a maximum of ten more years to survive in their past context, as auction houses, art fairs and the internet have taken control of the market (Delsalle, 2016). As Lorenzo Rudolf, Founder and Director of Art Stage Singapore would mention:

“Today if I am a gallery or an art fair, whether I like the situation or not, globalization is not stopping because of me; I am obliged to adapt myself or, even better, to see it as a chance. There are not only more competitors, but the cake has also become bigger.” (Delsalle, 2016).

It probably comes with no surprise that this general burgeoning art industry has created a constant and exhausting globe-trotting, a change that did not find everyone in the art world prepared. In those cases, globalization brought changes that smaller galleries seem unable to follow, jeopardizing their social status, with in some cases, like the ones mentioned above, even catastrophic results. Another disadvantage, for many the least noticeable one, of a frequent presence in art fairs, would be the constant interruption of a gallery’s schedule and of course the human and financial resources that would be constantly used from the gallery’s scheduling. Many galleries are including this information and costs in their annual programming, but due to the nature of the events and the art market, sometimes this is not enough and might still cause problems on the organizational and internal structure of a gallery (Neuendorf, 2016). But the fair organizers, who try through all means to fit on the international art calendar, feel this kind of struggle also. For example, 2015’s Art Basel had to change the date of its Hong Kong date from late May to mid-March, so that it did not come on the close dates with Basel’s own flagship fair in June. The move of the dates though fell right on the dates of TEFAF Maastricht creating once again confusion to the art professionals that are asked to be present in major art events as the above-mentioned fairs<sup>69</sup>. Like that, art fairs might end up being a victim of their own success and lose the glory that they have gained these past two decades (Art Radar Journal, 2016)<sup>70</sup>.

But as art fairs expand their action and create one-year long programming to engage with their audience, they somehow ended up being funded with corporate sponsorships. The examples that can be used in this section are multiple, like the sponsorship that Art Basel Hong Kong is getting from UBS AG –which they present

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<sup>69</sup> Art Basel’s Director, in an effort to comment the incident would comment that: “It’s reasonably insane. [...] How many places can we all be at one time?” (artradarjournal, 2016)

<sup>70</sup> Artradarjournal.com, (2015), *Fair-tigued: Are there too many art fairs?*, art radar, Retrieved from: <http://artradarjournal.com/2015/03/27/fair-tigued-are-there-too-many-art-fairs/> (last accessed in August 5, 2018)

as lead partners- and MGM Resorts International, along with the watchmakers Audemars Piguet Holding SA –which present as associate partners- (Tarmy, 2018). As the Director of Art Basel would later comment: “For the first twenty-five years of its existence, Art Basel had no corporate partnerships. But it would be a very different show without these sponsorships<sup>71</sup>” (Spiegel, 2018). Is this always acceptable and ethical? It can be possibly argued that the financial help coming from corporate partnerships should not be a red flag, as they can be the ones to help each and any institution develop and accomplish their goals. But we should have a more critical view on that. Sponsorships with firms that have a truthful unethical history should ideally be out of the table, even in times of financial struggle (Wright, 2014). Without a doubt, one can be cynical and focus on the marketing campaigns that big corporations aim while proceeding in such sponsorships. They can indeed be an effort towards brainwashing in order to create the image of a firm with a strong social responsibility. But of course, sponsorship is not philanthropy, but a strong business exchange. And it is exactly within this context that the trustees of each fair, even if that is a well-established like Art Basel, or an emerging one, like Code Art Fair in Copenhagen, should aim on a strong exchange that would benefit both parties, while always keeping a moral high-ground, as they are asked to decide not only whether the potential sponsorship will benefit the artistic cause of this collaboration, but also whether the corporation can stand along with the fair’s core values, a strategy that is implemented not only in art fairs, but in all cultural engaging organizations, like Biennales, museums, institutions or festivals. (Wright, 2014).

### **The Sustainability of the “Art Fair Age”**

On the previous two sub-chapters, we got a better understanding of both positive and negative aspects that this “Art Fair Age”, a term coined by Barragan, (2008)<sup>72</sup>, has brought. What is interesting at this point, is to examine the points that would suggest whether the international art fair model that has been introduced, can be sustainable or not, and if so, which are the elements that need special attention on the relation of the art fairs to the art market, on the following years.

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<sup>71</sup> Especially referring to the fair’s talks program, its especially designed section for smaller galleries and its outdoor performance night.

<sup>72</sup> Barragan introduces the term “art fair age”, in an attempt to develop the numerous ways that the art fairs have changed the art world, from discussing the art fairs as an “urban entertainment center” to a curated event for art fair curators (Barragan, 2008).



So far, it seems that what has happened, is the creation of a vicious circle, where big art fairs like the Armory Show or Art Basel, will continue to have extremely high participation fees, causing galleries to raise the prices of the exhibited artworks. For the mid-size galleries that will still not be able to participate due to the high fees, a new generation of smaller and alternative art fairs will be structured, that will draw participants from the larger organizations, but that will eventually also raise their own fees (Nazarevskaia, 2014). This as a fact, will put more pressure to the galleries, which while understanding that they can make even two thirds of their annual income from the right fair participations, and enhance their social presence in the art world by developing a strong networking profile (Delsalle, 2016), will face serious financial difficulties on covering even their essential costs. Making a very brief overview and talking about the social and political aspects of the art fair –as presented above-, it is understandable that the institution can bring a positive turn on the whole of the social systems, by becoming a platform for initiatives with social targets (educational and non-profit acts), a platform for young artists to show their capacities and enter the artworld, as well as a platform presenting art that discusses social and political issues. But the negative turn should not be neglected, since incidents of censorship have emerged within the institution, and since the people with positions of great importance often seem to either fall into failures as a result of political interests, with numerous examples throughout the years. Keeping the above in mind, it could be suggested that such a model cannot be sustainable and serious changes and efforts will need to be made so that the benefits that art fairs bring to the galleries (as presented above not only financial profit, but also strong networking opportunities, new clientele and opportunities for the right exposure), but also to society, will be worth the effort.

It could be argued that the quality of the works presented, along with the concept that every booth presents are key factors for an outstanding participation. But what is slowly being noticed is that art fairs tend to create trends and even shape contemporary art (Nazarevskaia, 2016). The idea behind that theory is simple. If collectors through the years have shown a clear preference to a specific artist or style, a gallery that aims in getting a good revenue from its fair participation will try to invest in that specific artist or style. So, is the art presented in the art fairs part of a



bigger mass production? It is exactly within this context that the idea of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their work *The Culture Industry* (1944) seems more relevant than ever. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, cultural products are integral part of the overall capitalistic system, that as a main target has the financial profit and the acquisition of power. According to the writers this kind of art and entertainment is produced mainly for the distraction of the masses from the actions of the ruling order, suggesting that this is a form of a contemporary way of the manipulation of the masses (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944). That leads us to understand that in those cases art is not autonomous but more of a product of the economic relations of production. And even though the references brought up by Adorno and Horkheimer are addressed mainly to products of mass production and entertainment like movies and music, the relevance of those examples with the contemporary art scene can still be seen – especially as presented in international contemporary art fairs. One might then ask how freely can the artists that are asked to present their works in their galleries' booths create?; can they actually create or are they mainly asked to produce?; and are they producing art for the fairs' sake while compromising their practices due to mainly financial reasons?

Back in 2012, The Financial Times had noted that: “Considering that White Cube is showing Kiefer in Hong Kong and both Gagosian and Ropac are launching their new spaces in Paris with Kiefer, it seems difficult not to believe that many artists might be overstretching their creative capacities.” (Art Radar Journal, 2015)<sup>73</sup>. Statistically, the art fairs select artists that have a strong artistic and educational background, with more than 70% of them having earned at least a bachelor's degree and with less than 36% of them having a formal art education. At the same time, individual artists and especially emerging ones, struggle to build their own name in the market while facing constant rejections that can even get up to 25% annually for events and shows that they might apply (DeLind, 1987). This fact brings a lot of pressure to these artists, as they are asked to create (or in this case better produce) artworks that can be immediately appealing, understandable and sellable, while at the same time eliminating the risks that them or their gallerists are willing to take. The Art Newspaper described this new homogenized art as “pieces that are moderate in

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<sup>73</sup> Artradarjournal.com, (2015), *Fair-tigued: Are there too many art fairs?*, art radar, Retrieved from: <http://artradarjournal.com/2015/03/27/fair-tigued-are-there-too-many-art-fairs/> (last accessed in August 5, 2018)

size so that they fit in a booth and are in tune with dominant market trends.” (Art Radar Journal, 2015)<sup>74</sup>. This can be considered also one of the reasons why galleries tend to commission their artists for the production of site-specific works, brand new and unseen, specifically conceived for the fairs (Nazarevskaia, 2016). This whole procedure seems a bit more difficult for the emerging artists who do manage to get accepted and present their works.

In a previous chapter, the many different ways that emerging galleries are getting unique professional benefits by participating in art fairs were discussed in detail. For blue-chip galleries, artists and artworks, the whole system is considerably way easier, as they manage to reach the desired audience without many complications. In the case of emerging artists things might be a bit more difficult from the very beginning, as it is always easier for their works (and of course for their galleries) to be rejected (Delsalle, 2016). And we should also take into consideration that galleries presenting both established and emerging artists, will choose the easier way of working with the established artist for the purposes of each fair. One example that can prove this point is Art Miami and Scope Art Fair, which although offer incredible opportunities to every participating artist to become internationally recognizable, they prefer to work primary with leading galleries and not with individual young and emerging artists (Delsalle, 2016).

Could someone state that in those cases we have in a way a democracy crisis in the arts (Espasmo, 2016)? This could be partially considered as a fact, as by the time not everyone gets the same opportunities this can be the case. But it should not be forgotten that as previously mentioned, the art fair system has its own roots on a given hierarchy and on capitalism. What needs to be definitely addressed and discussed is the relation of art critics and professionals with the art market. Through the past years and after the “art fair boom” (Delsalle, 2016), many are the art critics that feel outrageous with the way the art market is being formed, a fact that in some cases led

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<sup>74</sup> Artradarjournal.com, (2015), *Fair-tigued: Are there too many art fairs?*, art radar, Retrieved from: <http://artradarjournal.com/2015/03/27/fair-tigued-are-there-too-many-art-fairs/> (last accessed in August 5, 2018)

to even the absence of art critics from important art fairs<sup>75</sup> (Art Radar Journal, 2015)<sup>76</sup>. This brings a problem to critics and cultural producers:

“[the collectors are] in the hedge fund business, so they drop their windfall profits into art. It’s just not serious. Art editors and critics – people like me- have become a courtier class. All we do is wander around the palace and advise very rich people.” (David Hickey cited in Helmons and Gallagher, 2012)

But maybe it is not only the art critics’ opinions that need to be heard. The art dealers and the international art fair model should start giving more information to the public related to transactions that are being made, creating like that a more transparent art market. In other words, a market with clarity about the terms and conditions of every made transaction, pricing and consumers’ rights while buying and selling<sup>77</sup> (Macquisten, 2016). It is quite understandable that this is not an easy thing to do especially as the art market transparency might overlap with debates about public interest and the right to privacy, but a better consulting from trade professionals could definitely discover the right meeting point to secure transactions and a well-organized and regulated art market (Macquisten, 2016).

While the overall chapter can provide a better explanation on how the institution of the art fair has been developed, how it responds as a mediator on social and political issues of the contemporary society and how this mediation has affected the international art market (with a special mention to both the positive and negative undertones that this effect has), it is time to take a more specific look with the use of a case study. Using the inflated economy of the Emirates that has not been under the level of financial crisis that the rest of the art world has faced over the past decade,

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<sup>75</sup> As it is mentioned in art radar, “[...] absence of critical response to fairs, despite their importance to the contemporary art world, in magazines of art criticism such as Artforum or Art in America” (Art Journal, 2015).

<sup>76</sup> Artadarjournal.com, (2015), *Fair-tigued: Are there too many art fairs?*, art radar, Retrieved from: <http://artadarjournal.com/2015/03/27/fair-tigued-are-there-too-many-art-fairs/> (last accessed in August 5, 2018)

<sup>77</sup> The above mention of what could transparency in the art market mean, is dedicated to the consumer’s point of view. Another aspect can also be considered, related to the interest groups such as the politicians and the media, in which cases transparency would cover a wide range of topics such as provenance, finance, crime and market manipulation (Macquisten, 2016).

Art Dubai, a still emerging art fair, managed to enter dynamically the art map of international and annual events. What will follow in the next chapter, is a presentation of what this fair is and how it was initiated, while at the same time making an examination of its main achievements while critically observing how they manage to keep up with their initial goals and promises, in both sociopolitical and financial terms.

## 4. The Case of Art Dubai

### 4.1 The (short) history of Art Dubai

In a decade (2000-2010) that was characterized by a global crisis (the 2007–08 financial crisis), that affected even the most powerful economies, threatening the global financial system with a total collapse (Thakor, 2015), UAE and especially Dubai, managed to sustain its competitive advantage (Rettab, Brik, Mellahi, 2008). Even though it is located in one of the commonly considered least globalized regions of the world –the so-called Middle East- (Davidson, 2008), Dubai, due to a number of reasons that differ from its population to its geographical position<sup>78</sup>, developed further in financial and political terms, embracing a model that has been emulated not only by its neighbours, but also from other oil-producing and non-oil-producing countries of the Middle East, while attracting investments from all over the globe (Davidson, 2008). If it could be briefly addressed how this happened, we need to go back to Abu Dhabi's initial political project, a project that was to be implemented in a centralized monarchy through the redistribution of petrol rents from Abu Dhabi to the other Emirates of UAE, that would therefore need the direction of the UAE's capital. However, Dubai in the early 2000 started gaining its own independence as a federal state, mainly through warehouse commerce with other countries like Iran, a fact that eventually led to the unexpected blossoming in the real estate sector (Karezoumi, 2017: 120-131).

It was within this context that in 2007, the gallerist John Martin and a former financier, named Benedict Floyd, took the initiative to found the Gulf Art Fair, under the Patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein, wife of His Highness (HH) Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice-President and Prime Minister of UAE and Ruler of Dubai, as a part of the Art Dubai Group FZ LLC<sup>79</sup>, aiming for it to become one of the top five contemporary art fairs in the world,

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<sup>78</sup> Some of the reasons that we could mention at this point are: (1) the geographical advantage, as Dubai is a place that brings together Europe, Asia and Africa, (2) the fact that almost 78% of the population is formed by expats who choose Dubai as their workplace –the majority of whom come from Asia and Europe-, (3) the fact that the ruling family of Dubai has managed so far to keep the Emirate safe by any potential threat –in terms of criminality-, by providing a secure environment to its citizens and professionals who decide to invest in this city and lastly (4) the fact that Al Maktoum family (the ruling family of Dubai), has a clear vision of development in Dubai, hence the reason they continuously broaden its legitimacy from the traditional tribal to a favorable business environment (Davidson, 2008)

<sup>79</sup> Art Dubai Group FZ LLC, a joint venture company between Middle East Art Fairs Ltd. and the Dubai International Finance Center (DIFC) (Art Dubai, 2018).

within a time-scale of three years<sup>80</sup> (Art Daily, 2007)<sup>81</sup>. One of the two founders, Benedict Floyd, would often comment “When I came to Dubai, it really struck me that there are six hundred art fairs around the world and not one in the Middle East” (Floyd cited by Hancock and Walid, 2007).

This thought, along with the realization that Dubai is becoming a strong and active capital, and that the art market is an investment vehicle of an important significance, the directors of the fair came to an agreement with the Art Dubai Group FZ LLC mentioning that their move:

“... emphasises the increasingly close ties that exist between the international contemporary art market and the financial sector. The partnership is a significant and unique project in which a major financial institution will take an active role using the platform of art commerce to help construct a cohesive cultural strategy relevant for Dubai and the wider region. In bringing the international art market to Dubai, the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) will lay the necessary foundations for the region’s flourishing art scene to develop at the highest level.” (Art Daily, 2007)<sup>82</sup>,

While John Martin would later add that:

“Dubai is set to become a major centre for the global art market. Situated within easy reach of Russia, India and South-East Asia, it is ideally placed to become the focal point for some of the most exciting new art markets in the world. In bringing together the most innovative art in one of the

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<sup>80</sup> The fact that Dubai has a significant geographical location between Europe, Africa, Middle East and South Asia, and could offer a zero-tax environment to the visitors, made the city an ideal option for this new endeavor that among others, offered a focal point for the –at the time- booming Asian and Middle Eastern art market (Hancock and Walid, 2007).

<sup>81</sup> Artdaily.org, (2007), *DIFC partners with the Gulf Art Fair*, (artdaily.org, 2007), Retrieved from: <http://artdaily.com/news/19108/DIFC-Partners-With-the-Gulf-Art-Fair#.WyKAHjNKhmA> (accessed in June 10, 2018)

<sup>82</sup> Artdaily.org, (2007), *DIFC partners with the Gulf Art Fair*, (artdaily.org, 2007), Retrieved from: <http://artdaily.com/news/19108/DIFC-Partners-With-the-Gulf-Art-Fair#.WyKAHjNKhmA> (accessed in June 10, 2018)

world's most dynamic countries, the Gulf Art Fair hopes to establish Dubai as Asia's leading centre for contemporary art." (Art Daily, 2007)<sup>83</sup>.

From his side, His Excellency Dr. Omar Bin Sulaiman, Governor of the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), who at the time was working along with his team on building DIFC as a world-class financial centre, added:

"The Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), which possesses a significant art collection of its own, believes wholeheartedly in supporting the development of Dubai as a regional and international centre for the arts and the development of art in the region. Just as the DIFC has become a truly international gateway for capital, the DIFC Gulf Art Fair is positioned to become a global gateway for the arts. We are very pleased to join in leading this worthy initiative." (Art Daily, 2007)<sup>84</sup>.

On the first year of the fair, the efforts of Gulf Art Fair team seemed to fall into place as forty-one world-famous art galleries -like London's White Cube and Los Angeles' 1301 PE-, or the Gana Art gallery from Seoul, the Gallery Espace and Vadehra from India, Pekin Fine Arts from Beijing, the Sundaram Tagore from New York, the Albion from London and others (Elaine, 2007), all coming from twenty-six different cities, attended Gulf Art Fair, the first contemporary art fair with such a strong international presence ever to be held in the Middle East (Hancock and Walid, 2007). The galleries, established and emerging ones, that were recruited by the Directors of the fair, came from US, Europe, China, India, Japan and Korea (Elaine, 2007), a fact that can also explain the international reviews and reports that seemed to be really optimistic about the evolution of the organization, holding as key factors – among others- the fact that even though there had been a significant art presence in Shanghai, Singapore and Mumbai, there was still no art capital in Asia, and Dubai, mainly due to its geographic position, tax policy, number of established and emerging collectors and the increasing number of high-profile galleries from Europe and US,

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<sup>83</sup> Artdaily.org, (2007), *DIFC partners with the Gulf Art Fair*, (artdaily.org, 2007), Retrieved from: <http://artdaily.com/news/19108/DIFC-Partners-With-the-Gulf-Art-Fair#.WyKAHjNKhmA> (accessed in June 10, 2018)

<sup>84</sup> Artdaily.org, (2007), *DIFC partners with the Gulf Art Fair*, (artdaily.org, 2007), Retrieved from: <http://artdaily.com/news/19108/DIFC-Partners-With-the-Gulf-Art-Fair#.WyKAHjNKhmA> (accessed in June 10, 2018)

that had started opening their branches in the city, seemed to be a serious candidate (Hancock and Walid, 2007).

The historic change that the fair brought to the region, focuses on different aspects. Whereas important moves for the local art market had been made through the presence of the art auction house Christie's in Dubai and its numerous auctions, The Gulf Art Fair came to cover one more gap, which was the educational programs in such events. The cover of those gaps came along with a partnership of Sotheby's Institute with the "DIFC Global Art Forum"<sup>85</sup>, a three-days symposium that brought together more than forty regional and international artists, curators, dealers, museums directors, critics and academics in discussion of several topics, such as "The next ten years of contemporary art in Middle East" (Hancock and Walid, 2007)<sup>86</sup>. Some of the people who participated were the Belgian artist Wim Delvoye, the French-Moroccan artist Kader Attia, the Turkish artist Haluk Akakce, along with the French curator Jerome Sans, the Swiss curator and art critic Hans Ulrich Obrist, the Asian art critic Lace Fung, the Palestinian but US-based Jack Persekian and many more (Elainem 2007), providing a platform for a dialogue in discourse from people of different backgrounds and disciplines, but also of different origins, proving as it was mentioned in the introduction the effort that Art Dubai is putting, towards on becoming a bridge between different professional sectors and of course between the East and the West.

Getting back to the main structure of the fair, only one year after its official inauguration in 2007, in 2008, the fair changed its location and name –it was now officially called Art Dubai-, moving to Madinat Jumeirah, a luxurious hotel complex belonging to the Jumeirah group, owned by the ruling family of Dubai -a fact that can give a first insight of the tight connection that Art Dubai group and the ruling family of Dubai have-, and since then, with a significant increasing number of participating galleries, every March two halls of the hotel complex are transformed into gallery spaces dedicated to contemporary art (Sindelar, 2016).

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<sup>85</sup> The forum was co-ordinated by Maria Finders, the international project manager for Messe Basel, for whom she organizes Art Basel Conversations in both Art Basel and Art Basel Miami Beach. (Hancock and Walid, 2007)

<sup>86</sup> These talks were mainly targeting the emerging collectors, as well as artists, gallerists and art professionals from all around the world, addressing via their talks topics such as art trends, investment and strategies for new collections. At the same time a number of guided tours were taking place at the fair by art experts (Hancock and Walid, 2007).



As part of its continuous growth, in 2014, a new section of the fair was introduced, called “Art Dubai Modern”. Having Misk Art Institute as an exclusive partner (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>87</sup> and located in a hall of the Mina Salam Hotel –another hotel belonging to the same complex-, “Art Dubai Modern” is exclusively dedicated to galleries presenting modern art collections from Middle East, South Asia and Africa, and to works that have been influential throughout the 20th century (Sindelar, 2016).

In 2018, for its 12<sup>th</sup> edition, Art Dubai introduced a new gallery program, “The Residents”, dedicated to solo artist presentations from invited galleries whose artists would participate in a four to eight weeks residency. The residency of the eleven invited artists took place in UAE, in Dubai and Abu Dhabi<sup>88</sup>, as an effort to encourage international artists to immerse themselves in the local art scene, and to create a new body of works that would merge their distinct artistic practice with their surroundings. The results of this residency, was exhibited in a newly formatted space in Madinat Jumeirah, in the booths of the participating galleries (Art Dubai, 2018.)<sup>89</sup>.

It is important at this point to mention that this new addition brought a wave of confusion and different discussions to the art world, since even some of the participant artists –like Poonam Jain, who participated with the Dubai based 1x1 Gallery, had various objections due to the nature of the concept of residency (Jain, 2018). The problem would concentrate on the fact that residency programs should be focused on the creative process without expectations of an outcome, a fact that would give to the artists the freedom to take bold turns towards new directions (Chabon, 2017). The Art Dubai Residents though, were asked to create works that were to be exhibited –and eventually sold- during Art Dubai 2018, a procedure that brings in mind what has been discussed on the previous chapter. Adel Simmons, former President of The MacArthur Foundation that in 1991 seed money in eighteen

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<sup>87</sup> artdubai.ae, (2018), *Art Dubai Modern*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/art-dubai-modern/> (last accessed in June 20, 2018)

<sup>88</sup> The 3 locations that hosted the 11 artists during their residencies were the In5 and Tashkeel in Dubai, and Warehouse412 in Abu Dhabi. The 11 galleries – artists selected for this new section of the fair were: 1x1 Gallery (Dubai) - Poonam Jain, Erti Gallery (Tbilisi) - Tato Akhalkatsishvili, Mariane Ibrahim Gallery (Seattle) – Zohra Opoku, Galerie Kornfeld (Berlin) – Farshad Farzankia, Lakum Artspace (Riyadh) – Faris Alosaimi, The Mine (Dubai) – Yasuaki Onishi, Oktem & Aykut (Istanbul) – Jennifer Ipekeli, Orbital Dago (Bandung) – Iabadiou Piko, The Pooster Gallery (Vilnius) – Kristina Alisauskaite and Tyburn Gallery (London) – Victor Ehikhamenor (artdubai.ae).

<sup>89</sup> artdubai.ae, *Art Dubai Residents*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/residents-2-2/> (last accessed in June 20, 2018)

founding organizations in order to establish artist residencies, would mention justifying this move back then, that residencies recognize:

“...the supreme importance of nurturing the process of creation that is common to all artists... at a time when it is important to reaffirm the essential freedom that is necessary for all creative accomplishments”  
(Simmons cited by Chabon, 2017)

It could be argued that the above description comes in opposition to the procedure followed by Art Dubai, as in this case, the artists had to go through their creative procedure having in mind that their gallerists were expecting a certain outcome from their works, a fact that could possibly limit their artistic freedom and expression. This fact hides a crucial danger, as many artists could fall into the vicious circle of creating works characterized by trends that are proved to be preferred by the collectors, coming closer to what we have discussed in the previous chapter related to the artistic mass production and the Culture Industry, as described by Adorno and Horkheimer.

The most recent addition to Art Dubai's program, is a recently announced section, the Bawwaba<sup>90</sup>, which will feature ten solo representations at 20m<sup>2</sup> each, showcasing works created within the last year or conceived specifically for the fair. In an effort to promote the diversity of the organization, proposals will be accepted by artists from/based and/or focused on projects about Latin America, the Middle East, Africa and Central and South Asia (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>91</sup>.

What can be pointed out from the brief timeline presented above on Art Dubai's birth and evolution, is that the discussions of two friends and art lovers, who had a clear image of the capacities and a clear vision of the potentials Dubai had to offer as a new art market, created one of the most important contemporary annual art events. By choosing carefully its collaborations (from the main and multifaceted patronage of the ruling family to the presence of Sotheby's Institute and more), the Art Dubai

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<sup>90</sup> Bawwaba, a word that in Arabic means getaway (artdubai.ae).

<sup>91</sup> artdubai.ae, *Bawwaba*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/bawwaba/> (last accessed in June 20, 2018)

Group already achieved a lot: a growing list that exceeds the one hundred participating galleries and hosting the most extensive non-commercial program of any art or design fair worldwide. What is left to be discovered, and we will try to do so in detail on the following sub-chapters, is whether these collaborations, these initiatives and programs, manage to establish Art Dubai as one of the key players of the regional and international art market, and of course, if Art Dubai can indeed be considered a sociopolitical agenda of the Emirates.

#### **4.2 Art Dubai within the sociopolitical agenda of the Emirates**

For more than a decade now, the oil economy has allowed the Arab Gulf monarchies to acquire artworks of unique value<sup>92</sup> and to establish all the necessary infrastructures, which would give them the power to transform the global art market (Brones, Moghadam, 2016). The result of this inflated economic moves towards the arts, was not only the creation of a new generation of collectors in the region -that would eventually and dynamically enter the global art market-, but also the establishment of entire institutional networks in the Gulf Countries (Sindelar, 2016). Discussing specifically the example of the Emirates, the Emirate of Abu Dhabi hosts in its Saadiyat Island the franchises of Guggenheim and Louvre museums, the Emirate of Sharjah has been hosting the Sharjah Art Biennial since 1993 and lastly, Dubai has created a vibrant gallery scene, while also running Art Dubai, that as previously mentioned, is one of the most renowned art fairs in Middle East, that has not only managed to enter in a network of prestigious art fairs worldwide, but also manages in a unique way to cultivate the local art scene (Sindelar, 2016).

Focusing now on Art Dubai and its impact on a local and international scale, it is important to bring in mind that as it has been previously discussed, and in order to be socially, politically and financially relevant, it has to be part of a strong networking circle, which will contribute in the development of the social and political dimensions of an art fair (Sindelar, 2016). What is introduced as social dimensions in this chapter, will be described in detail from this point onwards, as there will be a detailed explanation and a better understanding of the social actions listed on the short description that someone can view by visiting the official website of Art Dubai,

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<sup>92</sup> An example can be considered the acquirement of “Beautiful Inside my Head Forever” of Damien’s Hirst for 10.3 million pounds from a representative of the al-Thani family, the rulers of Qatar, during a Sotheby’s auction in London in 2008 (Sindelar, 2016).

allowing us to have a better estimation of what the fair has achieved in terms of its social responsibility. The discussed description can be found below:

“...the Art Dubai group also runs the most extensive non-commercial programme of any art or design fair through education and commissioning local artists and designers: To date, more than five-thousand people, including three-thousand children, have taken part in its education programmes in art and design and over one-hundred artists and designers have received commissions, offering them the opportunity to exhibit their works at fairs and beyond. In addition, its thought-leadership programmes have promoted Dubai as a centre for knowledge and innovation in the creative industries in the Middle East...” (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>93</sup>.

### **Global Art Forum**

The discussion will start with the Global Art Forum. As previously mentioned, from the very first edition of Art Dubai –then called Gulf Art Fair- and with the coordination of Maria Finders, Art Dubai had the first Global Art Forum (or DIFC Global Art Forum). This symposium managed to bring together more than forty art professionals from all over the world to discuss what the future of contemporary art in Middle East was (Hancock and Walid, 2007).

The Global Art Forum gradually became an annual and transdisciplinary summit, tightly connected to the institution of Art Dubai, that aims at creating links between the East and the West and combines contemporary themes and innovative thinking in an intimate and live environment. The outcome of this summit after twelve years of operation, is the birth of new ideas and questions, after bringing together under the same roof more than four hundred people –locals and internationals- from the academia and the art world<sup>94</sup>, who tried through their talks and ideas to portray how the globalized world on the 21<sup>st</sup> century works (Art Dubai,

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<sup>93</sup> artdubai.ae, *About*, Retrieved from: [www.artdubai.ae/about/](http://www.artdubai.ae/about/) (last accessed in July 10, 2018)

<sup>94</sup> Over the years, artists, curators, museum directors, filmmakers, novelists, historians, philosophers, technologists, entrepreneurs, musicians and performers have been brought together through diverse and interdisciplinary dialogues (Art Dubai, 2018).

2018)<sup>95</sup>. The success of the forum was early noticed, a fact that led to publications, educational initiatives and even its touring to Qatar, Kuwait, France and the UK.

The topics that have been discussed in the platform of the Global Art Forum vary. From “Building future Art Cities” and “The Future of Contemporary Art in Middle East” –topics brought into question on the first edition of the forum-, and “Art Patronage in the Business Age” –the general theme of the second Global Art Forum in 2008, to “Trading Places” –a concept presented at the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of the forum and conceived by Shumon Basar<sup>96</sup> and “I am not a Robot”, the topic of the last edition of the forum in 2018. It is important though to notice that each one of the twelve editions of the Global Art Forum had something in common: through words, presentations, artistic expressions and practices, they approached the art world from different aspects and tried to “...(re)define the words, the phrases and ideas we think we know, and those we need to know, to navigate the 21<sup>st</sup> century...” (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>97</sup>. Did it really though manage to redefine –in a way- those terms as we know them today? Probably the results and outcomes of those forums will be shown in the short future through all the publications that will follow, on topics relevant to the ones discussed at the Global Art Forums through the years. What is for sure certain, is that the Art Dubai group managed to offer diversity not only to the discussed topics, but also to the invited speakers. Giving voice to people originated from the Middle East while at the same time not failing to attract art professionals, from Europe, US, Africa and Asia, giving ground to essential and crucial cultural interaction. And such an interaction in the context of an international organization, can be considered a micrography of the cultural interaction that our globalized world sustains (Appadurai, 1996). Even from the introduction, it was mentioned that Art Dubai aims on becoming a bridge that connects the East and the West. Borrowing now the idea of Appadurai, about the cultural interaction in the globalized world, it could argued that the Global Art Forum is working towards that direction. More specifically, over the years of its operation, collaborations between institutions of the East and the West

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<sup>95</sup> artdubai.ae, *Global Art Forum*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/global-art-forum/> (last accessed in July 12, 2018)

<sup>96</sup> Shumon Basar is a writer, curator and cultural critic, commissioner of the Global Art Forum in Dubai and among his other occupations, he is Editor-at-Large of Tank Magazine and a member of Fondazione Prada’s Thought Council.

<sup>97</sup> artdubai.ae, *Global Art Forum*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/global-art-forum/> (last accessed in July 12, 2018)

emerged within the context of Global Art Forum. Using only one of those examples, there will be a reference to the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, that earlier this year held in its own buildings an edition of the Global Art Forum, with the discussion titled “Global Art Forum: UAE Past, Present, Future”, focusing on the artistic and cultural scene of UAE, and how these scenes resonate across the world (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>98</sup>. For the purposes of this forum, and in order to maintain diversity in the discussion, some of the invited speakers were Zaki Nusseibeh, senior Government Official in the UAE and Minister of State in the UAE Government, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Swiss art critic and historian and Artistic Director of the Serpentine Galleries and Noah Raford, an American professional living the past years in Dubai and who is at the moment Chief Operating Officer for the Dubai Future Foundation (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>99</sup>. This kind of diversity (in both origins and disciplines) has been one of the main characteristics of Global Art Forum over the years –a fact that will be also proved by a more detailed list of participants that follows-, and that arguably provides indeed a window to cultural diversity in a globalized world.

Before closing the chapter of the Global Art Forum, it is important as mentioned, to name at least some of the participants and partners that contributed over these years to the evolution and the cultural diversity of the summit. The Dubai Culture and Arts Authority, Dubai Design District (d3), Institute of Contemporary Arts in London (ICA), The International New York Times, Ibraaz/Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Office of Strategic Cultural Relations at Qatar Museums Authority<sup>100</sup>, Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Abu Dhabi authority for Culture & Heritage (ADACH), Ministry of Culture of the Kingdom of Bahrain, The National and The Financial Times, are only some of the important partners of the Global Art Forum. With their own turn, Maria Fusco (art critic – writer), Lawrence Abu Hamdan (artist), Alessandro Bava (architect – artist), Hans Ulrich Obrist (curator – art critic), Aaron Schuster (philosopher – writer), Oscar Guardiola-Rivera (Professor of International Law and Globalisation), Elie Ayache (writer), Lauren Beukes (writer), Kristine

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<sup>98</sup> artdubai.ae, (2018), *Global Art Forum: UAE Past, Present, Future*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/global-art-forum-london/> (last accessed in August 27, 2018)

<sup>99</sup> artdubai.ae, (2018), *Global Art Forum: UAE Past, Present, Future*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/global-art-forum-london/> (last accessed in August 27, 2018)

<sup>100</sup> This partnership occurred in 2014, during the Qatar Brazil 2014 year of Culture at Katara Art Center (artdubai.ae), and 3 years before Qatar diplomatic crisis, when air, sea and land blockade was imposed on Qatar by four Arab countries, including the UAE (Toumi, 2018)

Khoury (researcher – photographer), Soultan Sooud Al Qassemi (columnist – founder of Barjeel Art Foundation), James Bridle (artist), GCC (artists’ collective), Lara Khaldi (curator), Ala Younis (artist – curator), Omar Berrada (curator), Douglas Coupland (artist – writer), Reem Fadda (curator), Sarah Abu Abdallah (artist), Negar Azimi (writer – editor) , Shezad Dawood (artist), Carol Yinghua Lu (curator – art critic), Philip Tinari (writer), Anton Vidokie (artist), Beatrix Ruf (curator) and Kader Attia (artist) are only a small example of the people that participated and shared their ideas and views on all the discussed topics (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>101</sup>.

### **The Sheikha Manal Little Artists Program**

Since 2012 and under the patronage of Her Highness Sheikha Manal bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, President of the UAE Gender Balance Council, President of Dubai Women Establishment and wife of His Highness Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Presidential Affairs UAE, the non-commercial program of Art Dubai has been expanded to younger ages also, including workshops, publications and discovery tours for UAE based children and teenagers, between the ages of five to seventeen (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>102</sup>.

All the activities are especially conceived for the fair by international and UAE based artists, after the partnership of Art Dubai’s team with The Cultural Office of Dubai, and aim to inspire and encourage all the young attendants to get involved and excel in the arts (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>103</sup>. On a parallel note, the program introduces new art educational approaches, experimental teaching methods and pedagogical explorations while giving the opportunity to local artists to capitalize on the prospect of working with international renowned ones, exchange ideas, develop their practice and specialize in children’s education (Hatern, 2018).

For the first edition of the Sheikha Manal Little Artists Program, the Tangier-based artist Yto Barrada along with the designers Zid zid Kids, created the program of “Morocco to the Moon”<sup>104</sup>, and it was inspired by the 1950’s sci-fi era, featuring astronauts, aliens and robots. The selection of the artist was not a random choice. Yto

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<sup>101</sup> artdubai.ae, *Global Art Forum*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/global-art-forum/> (last accessed in July 12, 2018)

<sup>102</sup> artdubai.ae, *Children and Teens*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/children-teens/> (last accessed in July 13, 2018)

<sup>103</sup> artdubai.ae, *Children and Teens*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/children-teens/> (last accessed in July 13, 2018)

<sup>104</sup> Which was produced in collaboration with Louis Vuitton.



Barrada has always presented in her practice a strong activist approach, with strong social and political extends. One example can be considered her series *A Modest Proposal* (2009) (see figure 9), a project that took place in Rabat, in Morocco, a city that sets strict limitations to the artistic creation as it can be often perceived as dangerous to the power (Karroum, 2010).



Figure 9  
Yto Barrada (Paris, 1971)  
*Beau Geste* (2009)  
Video still of 16mm film  
A Modest Proposal Series  
Courtesy of Yto Barrada

Keeping that as the core element of her work, Yto addressed this topic with an almost anarchic approach, discovering the ways that a palm tree, one of the most easily recognizable characteristics of Moroccan landscape, can become a sign of artistic participation in constructing a society that is ecological and generous to its citizens (Karroum, 2010)

Taking now into consideration studies that associate arts and children development, according to which children that are exposed to arts present greater historical empathy, a better educational memory and advanced critical thinking skills (Greene, Kisida and Bowen, 2014), the importance and complexity of such endeavours can be understood. Those elements would serve as a unique exploration area for all the participating kids and teenagers that would indirectly help their cultural awareness, inventiveness, social development and even their practical educational and academic skills (Forseth and Gilliatt, 1979).

What followed, was commissions to international artists like Dylan Martorell, Nicolas Paris, Polly Brannan, Suzan Drummen and Hiromi Tango (Art Dubai,



2018)<sup>105</sup>, artists that present a diverse artistic background (as some work more with installations, others with textiles, sculptures etc), while all at the same time they have all demonstrated social and political character through their practice. This diverse selection, helps in enhancing the creativity of the young UAE based children that participate, as it helps them broaden their horizons and get closer to new ideas and perspectives, brought from cultures different that the ones they have been raised up with. In this case Art Dubai manages to connect not only the East and the West, but to also build smaller bridges, of still great importance for the cultural diversity they have to offer.

### **Art Dubai Modern Symposium**

Significantly more recent that the above mentioned educational activities, is the Art Dubai Modern Symposium, which was inaugurated in 2017 with the support of Alserkal Avenue, Dubai's "foremost arts hub, bringing together collaborators from diverse artistic disciplines" (Alserkal Avenue, 2007)<sup>106</sup>. The symposium, on its two editions, has been showcased in the form of a series of talks and presentations, focused on the life, work and cultural impact of some of 20<sup>th</sup> century masters from the Middle East, South Asia and Africa<sup>107</sup> (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>108</sup>.

Like in the case of Global Art Forum, the Art Dubai Symposium, in both of its editions, invited renowned international and local curators, scholars and patrons - some of whom will be mentioned below- who led the sessions and came into depths of discovery for various topics related to the styles, the influences and practices of the artists that contributed through their works in the art evolution between the 1940s and 1980s, on an international scale (Alserkal Avenue, 2007)<sup>109</sup>. Bringing now in mind the approach of Alistair Hudson (academic and former Director of Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art), on art and social change, we get the chance to embrace the idea that once we manage to reflect upon the plurality of our cultures and artistic

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<sup>105</sup> artdubai.ae, *Children and Teens*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/children-teens/> (last accessed in July 13, 2018)

<sup>106</sup> Alserkal Avenue, *Our story*, Retrieved from <https://alserkalavenue.ae/en/about/index.php> (last accessed in August 23, 2018)

<sup>107</sup> As previously mentioned, the whole section of Art Dubai Modern in Mina Salam, was dedicated to selected modern art from the regions of Middle East, South Asia and Africa, so it comes with no surprise that the Art Dubai Modern symposium, would be focused on the same regions.

<sup>108</sup> artdubai.ae, *Art Dubai Modern symposium*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/modern-symposium-2018-2/> (last accessed in July 13, 2018)

<sup>109</sup> alserkalavenue.ae, *Art Dubai Modern Symposium*, Retrieved from: <http://alserkalavenue.ae/en/event/art-dubai-modern-symposium.php> (last accessed in July 13, 2018)

developments, we can achieve the acknowledgements that may lead to the social change the contemporary communities and cultures need (Hudson, 2016). Possibly only through this kind of reflection and acknowledgement contemporary societies will manage to overcome Western and Eurocentric perspectives and pay a tribute to Eastern masters that have contributed with their work and practice in the international art scene.

Some of the invited people who participated in the symposium, were Till Fellrath and Sam Bardaouil (curators - co-founders of Art Reoriented), Nada Shabout (art historian), Thuraya Al Baqsami (artist), Eiman Elgibreen (artist – lecturer), Noora Al Mualla (curator), Mona Khazindar (previous Director of Institut du Monde Arabe), Henry Kim (Director and CEO of Aga Khan Museum) and many more (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>110</sup>.

### **Art Dubai Fellowship**

Although the initiatives mentioned above refer to a structure built for the duration of the fair, the Art Dubai Group leads also a whole-year long non-commercial program, which includes among others, the Art Dubai Fellowship. According to Art Dubai's official website "Art Dubai Fellowship is a program for exceptional artists, curators and writers working in the Arab world and beyond, coming together for a week-long series of intensive workshops during Art Dubai." (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>111</sup>

The fellowship was initiated in 2011, and since then, more than twenty-six fellows have participated. Unfortunately, the information related to the selection of the participants, and the financial agreements that are developed between them and the Art Dubai Group are not available to the public. Given the fact that there have not been application forms and open calls for the discussed section, it could be argued that the selection is happening directly from the Art Dubai team. Acknowledging that the way that the selection is done can have a clear effect on the social impact and character of this initiative, a question has been raised already to the people in charge, and the information will be updated as soon as the answers have been received.

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<sup>110</sup> artdubai.ae, *Art Dubai Modern symposium*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/modern-symposium-2018-2/> (last accessed in July 13, 2018)

<sup>111</sup> artdubai.ae, *Art Dubai Fellowship*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/art-dubai-fellowship-2018/> (last accessed in July 13, 2018)

The reason why this initiative is included in this chapter, comes along with the words of Paul Gilroy and an idea that has already been discussed on our previous chapter, related to convivial culture. So, borrowing once again this notion, -the tumultuous daily interaction of people of different races-, it could be said that a diverse group like the one that is offered by the Fellowship, can work creatively together on not only filling the gaps of one's identity, but also on creating something new, artistically and socially, based on such a multicultural exchange (Gilroy, 2004). This is something that can happen during this intense week, as the participants do not have only the chance to exchange views and ideas, but also to network, something that has been proven by the continuation of some collaborations, beyond the experiences and the extend of the Fellowship (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>112</sup> Every year, a selection of approximately five artists, writers and curators, is made, who under the guidance of a lead tutor, work on the production of texts and writing on the given topics and themes. As most of Art Dubai's initiatives, this one is open to both international and local art professionals, but what changes is the structure of it: this daily and intense engagement of different people, from different countries and different backgrounds, that can be seen as a micrography of our society.

And if someone would wonder why a one-week intense program is included in the all year long programming of the Art Dubai group, it is important to mention that –setting as an example the Art Dubai Fellowship that came was completed in 2018-, the participants are committed to three-day workshops over two consecutive years (in this case 2017 and 2018), where they had the chance to produce a collective piece of writing. This piece, was the one to be presented in the end of March 2018, during the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of Art Dubai (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>113</sup>.

### **Art Dubai Campus**

Since 2016, the Art Dubai group inaugurated one more non-commercial initiative, this time, the Campus Art Dubai (CAD). CAD, an initiative that comes in partnership with Dubai Culture and Arts authority, Dubai Design District and Art Jameel (as the curatorial partner), and provides five-month courses to UAE-based artists, writers, curators and cultural producers. During those five intensive months,

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<sup>112</sup> artdubai.ae, *Art Dubai Fellowship*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/art-dubai-fellowship-2018/> (last accessed in July 13, 2018)

<sup>113</sup> artdubai.ae, *Art Dubai Fellowship*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/art-dubai-fellowship-2018/> (last accessed in July 13, 2018)

the participants have the chance to develop their practices with the guidance of renowned tutors (Art Dubai, 2018).

The program includes weekly meetings, group critiques, discussions and presentations, all led by international and local academics, artists and art professionals, while it enhances the critical thinking and the exchange of ideas in a collaborative and challenging way (Leech, 2017). What is maybe more significant about CAD, is that instead of talking about art, the participants discuss everything around it, something that brings in mind the main idea and purpose of art activists, who through their practice open a dialogue that does not necessarily change the art system from the inside, but criticizes and aims to change everything around it (Groys, 2014), something that can be achieved only with critical exchange like the one that Art Dubai Campus has been trying to offer. It is also important to notice that this is the only initiative of such kind to be taking place in UAE, something that as a fact gives to the participants the intellectual space they cannot find somewhere else in the region (Leech, 2017). A region –Middle East- that for sure can inspire the artists, writers and other professionals to be more critical in their works, politically and socially, not only due to the ongoing political, financial and social crises that thrive all over the region, but also due to negative response that Middle Eastern governments have had over the years to artistic practices and creations. As such an example, we can use the country of Iran, and the imprisonment of Iranian artists that create works that are considered to be a conspiracy against the government, and the imprisonment of art dealers and art professionals, with accusations that vary from espionage to betrayal (Neuendorf, 2018). As long as such examples exist, initiatives like Art Dubai Campus are needed as an effort and a weapon for the creation of places that will work in favor of the freedom of expression of the artists and all other creatives. All those people, that as Tania Bruguera would argue through her ideas on useful art, can create works that deal with politics and with consequences, works that focus on the beauty of being useful (Bruguera, 2011).

## **Art Dubai Commissions**

In 2010, having Bidoun Projects<sup>114</sup> as the curatorial partner, Art Dubai hosted a series of non-commercial exhibitions, commissions, screenings and educational events that would engage with the fabric of the fair (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>115</sup>. The eight selected artists, with their works gave a new vibe to the location of the fair with their temporary installation, setting the standards for the commissions of the following years. This collaboration set the standards not only on the quality of the upcoming commissions, but also on the social character that the fair wants to demonstrate through such initiatives. To be more precise, even from the introduction of this chapter it was mentioned that Art Dubai aims on being a bridge in discourse between the East and the West. This idea and goal comes in total agreement with the core values of Bidoun Projects, that as they would describe in their website:

“Since 2004, Bidoun has filled a gaping hole in the arts and culture coverage of the Middle East, pioneering a distinctive voice that is intelligent, critical, and original. From the beginning, Bidoun has served as a platform — for new questions, images, and ideas about the Middle East” (Bidoun, 2009)<sup>116</sup>

What followed in the next seven editions of the fair, was an annual selection of artists, who would create strong, site-specific installations for the ground of the fair, with some of them producing their works during their residency at the program Artists in Residence (A.i.R)<sup>117</sup> (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>118</sup>. For the first time, in 2018, the fair’s commissions program was devoted exclusively to performance art, with selected artists performing throughout the duration of the fair (Brady, 2017).

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<sup>114</sup> Bidoun Projects, registered as a non-profit organization as per 501©(3), is a platform working throughout Middle East with curatorial initiatives, educational programs, artists commissions, talks, tours, performances and a series of publications (bidoun.org).

<sup>115</sup> ArtDubai.ae, *Art Dubai Commissions*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/commissions-2017/> (last accessed in July 15, 2018)

<sup>116</sup> Bidoun.org, (2009), *Introduction*, Retrieved from: <https://bidoun.org/about/introduction> (last accessed in August 28, 2018)

<sup>117</sup> Artists in Residence (A.i.R Dubai), a project which was among others in collaboration with Delfina Foundation, Tashkeel and Dubai Culture and Arts Authority, supports international and UAE based artists by providing a platform to develop their practice and create new works, while promoting the exchange of ideas and artistic expressions/ During their residency the artists were asked to produce a site-specific work for the Art Dubai Projects. A.i.R Dubai’s last edition was in 2017, as from 2018, Art Dubai inaugurated a new section, “The Residents”.

<sup>118</sup> ArtDubai.ae, *Art Dubai Commissions*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/commissions-2017/> (last accessed in July 15, 2018)

And even though lately there has been a wave of opposition towards commissioned works, as for instance the project “No Commission” -that was also featured in Art Basel 2017-, and that aims to build a free space for creators (Beatz, 2017), the following needs to be taken into consideration: the success of an art fair, as previously mentioned, for both gallerists and their artists, is not limited only to sales, but mainly to building a strong reputation for all participants. These participants, that are mostly emerging or in their mid-level career, have the chance to create works that can truly bridge the East and West. Artists from the East and West, present site-specific works in the East, with a strong presence of regional and international art patrons and collectors. Such an endeavour, does not only provide a ground for potential future collaborations and professional evolution, in a similar way as the previous used examples of Frieze London and Frieze Projects, but also has the potential of starting a powerful and fruitful discussion between East and West, necessary for a fair that wants to be considered a bridge in discourse.

### **Art Dubai’s Political Undertones on Regional and International Scale**

What can be overall noticed from the above description is that Art Dubai through these years has presented a strong social responsibility, and given the fact that we are talking about a large corporation, we are referring to a strong corporate social responsibility (CSR). Although for many years there was not a clear connection between the social responsibility of a corporation or organization to its political aspects, the past two decades, there has been noticed a rising interest in the political undertones and dimensions that social responsibility (or CSR as previously mentioned) hides (Makinen and Kourula, 2012). Recent studies have suggested that companies through their social actions (including voluntary and educational initiatives) or through their memberships in advisory committees (or in the case of Art Dubai and other cultural organizations through their committees of trustees), create political channels that may differ depending on the goals of each party (Frynas, Stephens, 2013).

Talking specifically about Art Dubai now, and using as a starting point the words of its former Director, Antonia Carver that follow, in this subchapter the ways that this institutional event managed –if so- to create political channels on regional and international scale will be examined.

“Art Dubai takes on the identity of its city and really hones a very particular space in the art world calendar. (...) We try to be a different art fair and contribute to the local art scene by developing programs all year round. We believe by being locally relevant, we are interesting to the international community as well.”(Yaqoob, 2013).

Only three years ago, according to a recent study, Art Dubai, managed to generate thirty million euros (thirty-five million USD), with a total of 25,000 visits by 15,625 unique visitors, half of who came from outside of Dubai<sup>119</sup> (Milliard, 2015).

Such numbers, along with the fact that during the financial and political crisis of 2008, the art scene of the region was the only one not to be affected in comparison to the art scene of the biggest art capitals<sup>120</sup> (Paterson, 2014), gave the perfect trigger for Art Dubai to bloom and have a clear impact in several aspects of Dubai’s evolution, as we know it today. Most importantly, they contributed to what is known as Dubai’s “city-corporation” (*al-madīna–al-sharīka*), a term firstly mentioned by ‘Abd al-Khāliq ‘Abd Allāh, and defines all the elements that determine the journey of Dubai from regionalism to cosmopolitanism (Sindelar, 2016).

This idea was empowered by one more important factor: the increasing number of galleries to open in Dubai. The development of the artistic character that the rulers of Dubai wish the city to have, which is closely related to the general development of art related activities in Dubai, includes the increasing number of galleries opening – local or international branches-, a fact that can also be charged to the success of Art Dubai through the past decade (Sindelar, 2016).

Art Dubai opened some new channels on an international level as well. Having managed to establish itself as one of the most important art events annually, through the past years many collaborations with high-profile international institutions occurred, from Tate, LACMA, the Guggenheim and the British Museum to the Metropolitan Museum, Centre Pompidou, Institute du Monde Arabe and the Hong

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<sup>119</sup> During the days of art Dubai in 2015 they were counted 27,500 hotel bookings (Sindelar, 2016).

<sup>120</sup> “The regional gallery scene and art market have shown remarkable resilience. Contrary to other cultural capitals, galleries did not close in Dubai and the arts scene actually expanded during this time. The depression in Europe has perhaps accelerated the shift towards the East, as well as forcing institutions, galleries and the like to come to see themselves as part of a globalised art world” (Joseph and Peterson, 2014).



Kong Art Fair Museum<sup>121</sup> (Sindelar, 2016). Such interest can be also explained by the fact that annually an increasing number of art reports is dedicated to the Middle Eastern art market and Art Dubai (Joseph and Peterson, 2014), the first fair in the region that has worked as a unique platform in times of political conflict to market art from countries like Iran, to an international audience (Moghdham, 2013). This as a fact, shows how Art Dubai managed to enter the international environment of art fairs, engaging and performing not only in a regional scale, but mainly in an international one (Sindelar, 2016).

In order to prove this point, and understand how Art Dubai manages to follow this flow and its impact to an international level, a quick look at Art Basel<sup>122</sup>, the fair that set the example for international art fairs, can be taken (Sindelar, 2016). Art Basel, is an annual event, that manages to bring together, under the same roof galleries from all over the world<sup>123</sup> –even blue-chip ones<sup>124</sup>–, artists, collectors and art professionals. Most importantly, it manages to attract international audience from different art scenes worldwide – elements that can be found in every edition of Art Dubai (Sindelar, 2016).

Up to this point, a closer look was taken to the different ways that Art Dubai presents a mild political development, locally, regionally or internationally, in a positive turn, through financial outcomes in favor of the government of the UAE, and the relation of Art Dubai with the cultural agenda that the government wanted to develop. It is though crucial to mention two examples that show the relation of Art Dubai to the politics of UAE from a different perspective. In this case, we refer to the selection of the participating galleries and the incidents of censorship.

Starting with the participating galleries, even though Art Dubai has been branded as the most global and multifaceted art fair worldwide, and even though the

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<sup>121</sup> According to Art Dubai's report, only in 2015 almost 400 museums directors and representatives attended the fair (Sindelar, 2016).

<sup>122</sup> Art Basel is considered the template for art fairs globally. A bright example of that characterization has been given by Woon Tai ho, art collector and former marketing director of the National Gallery in Singapore, as he calls Art Basel the “virtual template of what art fairs are today” (Sindelar, 2016)

<sup>123</sup> It is argued that the composition of the galleries shows a bias towards European galleries (Sindelar, 2016).

<sup>124</sup> Blue chip gallery is a term used to galleries that promote art with a great value, that is reliable profitable and expected to hold or increase economic value, regardless of the general economic ups and down. Blue chip artists are icons whose works' value have been decided through consistent years of sales and confirmed at auction while early blue chip artists are emerging talents who show signs of exponential resale growth (artland.com).



number of galleries participating has been significantly increased since its first edition, the countries participating seem to remain the same, with no new additions, especially the past five years. And although the reasons for this may vary, there is one characteristic example that is a clear outcome of the tight connection of Art Dubai with the governmental orders. UAE does not officially support or welcome Israel, and Israeli passport-holders cannot legally enter the country, a fact that has led the two countries in the interruption of any formal economic or diplomatic ties (Henderson, 2015). Art Dubai, following the line of the government<sup>125</sup>, in its twelve editions never included an Israeli gallery or invited Israeli artists and speakers, not even Israelis that are passport-holders of another nation (Sindelar, 2016).

And getting now to the censorship, although the political and critical voice of many works exhibited at the booths of the fair is easily noticed, there have been several cases, where the organization was asked to follow the strict governmental rules and regulations, and either remove works from the booths or re-adjust their image. An example can be found in 2012, already five years after the first edition of the fair, when Dubai authorities ordered at least four pieces to be removed from the booths of their galleries, prior the visit of members of one of the Emirate's ruling family (Gara, 2012). One of those works was a painting inspired by the infamous image of a young, activist woman being beaten and dragged by Egyptian soldiers during the Egyptian Revolution in December of 2011. The violent incident that inspired the painting, took place in Tahrir Square in Cairo in December of 2011, with the Egyptian revolution where thousands of Egyptians demonstrated hoping to fight the regime of the autocratic rule of the thirty-years old President Hosni Mubarak, and was documented by international journalists who were present in order to cover the revolution. The discussed graphic footage, showed helmeted officers dragging and beating her, while she was laying almost naked on the ground (Hassan and Borger, 2011) (see figure 10).

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<sup>125</sup> What is left to be noticed, is whether Art Dubai will follow the line of the government in the case of Qatar as well, a country that earlier this year faced the cut of all financial ties from several countries, including UAE.



Figure 10  
Ahdaf Soueif (Cairo, 1950)  
*Untitled* (2011)  
Photography  
Courtesy of Ahdaf Soueif

Another work, the *After Washing #3* (2015) of Shadi Al Zaqzouq (see figure 11), was depicting a woman holding underwear with the word *irHal*, written on them (Gara, 2012).



Figure 11  
Shadi Al Zaqzouq  
*After Washing #3* (2015)  
Oil on Canvas  
70 x 70 cm  
After Washing Series  
Courtesy of Shadi Al Zaqzouq

This choice of word was not random, as *irHal*, which literally means ‘leave’, was of great importance for the Arab Spring. To be more precise, the word, starting from the Evolution in Tunisia, started being used with the meaning of ‘Reform’, inviting all citizens to join the Evolution and bring the change they were seeking for. Eventually, and as the Tunisian uprising had captured the attention of the wider Arab region, the word started being used and re-appropriated in local dialects across the so-called Middle East and North Africa (Nazir, 2013). One more work that was asked to be removed, was an artwork based on maps using the term “Persian Gulf” instead of “Arabian Gulf”, which is the term that Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) governments

insist on using (Gara, 2012) <sup>126</sup>. Three years after these incidents, in 2015, another example of censorship occurred, as one of the works of Kaveh Golestan, Iranian artist and photojournalist killed in 2003 by a landmine while covering the Iraq War for BBC (Kaveh Golestan Organization, 2018) <sup>127</sup>. In one of the selected works of Golestan, an untitled photograph from his series *Az Div o Dad* (1976) (see figure 12) that was chosen from the curator of the booth, Vali Mahlouji, the viewers could see naked beauties frolic with exotic snakes. Mahlouji, following the suggestions of the Art Dubai team, covered with silver sticker all the parts where nudity appeared, in fear that the visitors might be offended.



Figure 12  
Kaveh Golestan (Tehran, 1950)  
*Untitled* (1976)  
Polaroid Photography  
3,5 x 4,25 cm  
*Az Div o Dad* Polaroid Series  
Courtesy of Kaveh Golestan

There are several points in this incident that can cause distress, starting from the fact that as a work of art, and most importantly as a photograph, the censored work from the series *Az Div o Dad* (1976), carries a historical importance and a big amount of information that are addressed to the viewers. As the curator, without the approval of the artist, proceeded in that decision, automatically hid part of the history depicted in the work and maybe even changed part of it, in the altar of general acceptance and possible financial profit. As the discussion around the incident aroused, Mahlouji commented: “I strongly disagree, but I understand the rules of the place. Covering

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<sup>126</sup> The details of the three-mentioned works (as the name of the artists and the titles of the works) have not seen the public light.

<sup>127</sup> kavehgolestan.org, *The Photography of Kaveh Golestan – Biography*, Retrieved from:

<http://www.kavehgolestan.org/#/page/123> (last accessed in June 19, 2018)

them a little bit allows me to show the archive”, while Antonia Craver, Director of Art Dubai at the time, had commented:

“It’s a scene that’s gradually opening up, step by step. But at the same time, we are super aware that this is a region with its own traditions, its laws, its own way of working, and we respect that – in part to make sure that we are always gaining the maximum audience.” (Antonia Craver cited by Milliard, 2015).

At this point, it is important to mention that the nation of UAE, even though it has tried to enter a so-called international art world in many different ways, -a world with highly interconnected societies though a continuous informative and cultural exchange-, and many would argue that it has been quite a successful procedure, it seems to face a certain difficulty in adapting completely, probably due to its geographical location – Middle East – (Davidson, 2018). The examples of censorship, ordered by the government as presented above, are a proof of exactly that point. And it should not be forgotten that those examples quite successfully illustrate the junction between the cultural and the political, allowing every act of censorship to become an act of iconoclasm, as to censor –or in other cases destroy- an artwork or any form of expression, because of its political or social meaning, is to testify to its hold over its public. Artworks never were, and will never be just a simple applause to the skills of their creators, but a state attached to the physicality, the emotions and the thoughts that they arouse, a fact that is acknowledged and leads to unnecessary censorship (Freedberg, 2016).

What the Art Dubai team seems to fail to understand at this point, is that they should not aim strictly to a simple aestheticization, but an artistic one, through which a defunctionalisation of the medium and the annulation of its practical efficiency can be achieved. Immanuel Kant has conceptualized this –for some- revolutionary approach towards aesthetics, making clear its political context, by saying:

“If someone asks me whether I find the palace that I see before me beautiful, I may well say that I do not like that sort of thing ... ; in true Rousseauesque style I might even vilify the vanity of the great who waste the sweat of the people on

such superfluous things ... All of this might be conceded to me and approved; but that is not what is at issue here ... One must not be in the least biased in favor of the existence of the thing, but must be entirely indifferent in this respect in order to play the judge in the matter of taste” (Kant cited by Guyer, 2000)

What can be understood from Kant’s words, while he describes his acceptance of seeing a palace aestheticized, negated and non-existent for all practical purposes (Groys, 2014), is that as we are living in times of total aestheticization, everyone, and most importantly people who have the platform –as in our case the artists presented in Art Dubai’s booths-, can indeed aestheticize the world while still acting within it, as in this case political actions are not blocked, but on the contrary, enhanced.

#### **4.3 Art Dubai and the Art Market of the Emirates**

Bringing now once again in mind the idea of the interconnected social systems, as discussed in the introduction using the views of Niklas Luhmann, we will try to approach the ways the social and political context in which Art Dubai has been developed and has been functioning, in the way that they are presented after the first twelve years of its existence, have affected the regional art market. Art Dubai has managed even as an emerging art fair, to become a significant event of the international annual calendar, due to many different reasons: from significant collaborations in terms of sponsorships, to the increasing amount of sales, the art market of Dubai and UAE in general, has seen remarkable changes due to Art Dubai, and some of these aspects will be discussed below.

#### **Patronage**

Even though there was not a special mention regarding patronage on the previous and general review of the relation of art fairs with the art market, one of the most important and decisive parts of the art market is the art patronage<sup>128</sup>. This is something that has been proved over the years and that has had a significant importance for individual artists, but also for art institutions and organisations -and art

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<sup>128</sup> Patronage, the financial sponsorship of artists or institutions, by individuals or institutions, paved the way for some of history’s most enduring works of art. Even though that was a practice that had been taking place for years, it was only around the time of the Renaissance that the names of the patrons started being recorded (Mann, 2016).

fairs could not be an exception. Art patrons, have always been present not only to offer to the creators a pathway to success through the coverage of living expenses along with the supplies they need for their practice, but also, they are the ones, who – as well in the case of institutions-, can guarantee their economic stability, asking in return their names on a specific show or even section of an institution (Miller, 2017). As RoseLee Goldberg would claim: “Today’s patrons are similar to “angel investors” of tech. You see that something has potential to grow and you want to support that incubation period.” (Miller, 2017). This last statement, can somehow justify the fact that Art Dubai, even though it is an emerging art fair, has a significant list of patrons that has supported it throughout its twelve years of existence.

Having said that, it is the right moment to name some of them, in order to get a better understanding of the support Art Dubai has had these past years, from people with commitments to the contemporary art scene in the Middle East and beyond.

As Honorary Patron, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, while Her Highness Sheikha Manal Bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, President of the UAE Gender Balance Council, President of Dubai Women Establishment and wife of HH Sheikh Mansour Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Presidential Affairs of UAE, as the Patron of the Ladies Preview (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>129</sup>. Those two names, are also a proof of the close relation that has been developed between the government and Art Dubai, and it could be suggested that this role that the Royal family has, provides the ground for restrictions on the autonomy of the Art Dubai group, and imposition of ideas and positionings in censorship cases, like the ones mentioned above.

Of course, the list of Art Dubai’s patrons does not consist only of members of the government, but it is mainly structured by collectors and art professionals, like Lateefa Bint Maktoum –artist, curator and Founder/Director of Tashkeel in Dubai-, Zain Masud –collector and independent advisor in London-, Maya Rasammy – collector and patron at Tate Gallery, Co-chair at Tate Middle East and North Africa acquisitions committee in London and many more <sup>130</sup>. Opening here a small

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<sup>129</sup> artdubai.ae, *Committees*, Retrived from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/committees/> (last accessed in June 22, 2018)

<sup>130</sup> The entire list of Art Dubai’s patrons is the following: Mohammed Afkhami, Paula Al Askari, Shermine Asghar, Kito De Boer, Maryam Eisler, His Excellency Omar Ghobash, Muna Al Gurg, Dr. Lamees Hamdan, Princess Wijdan Al Hashemi, Tariw Al Jaidah, ali Yussef Khadra, Sheikh Terky Al



parenthesis, it is important to use this last reference, the Tate Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and mention that a large number of Western institutions both in Europe and United States of America, have departments dedicated to the wider area of MENA, demonstrating like that the increased interest that the West is showing to the East and its diverse culture.

Closing the parenthesis and going back to the main discussion, it is understandable, that such a big annual event, except from patrons that will guarantee its financial stability, needs a list of powerful sponsors and partners that through their services, will provide all the necessary elements for the implementation of the fair. In the case of Art Dubai, the list of sponsors is changing annually, always for the best benefit of the organization. For the 12<sup>th</sup> and last –so far- edition of the fair, an interesting decision was made, almost creating a conflict within the debate of the ethics of sponsorship, as one the main sponsors was the BMW Group<sup>131</sup>. Keeping in mind that the bottom line of every sponsorship negotiation should be the values of the institution, the trustees are asked to decide whether taking on a sponsorship will not have any further effect on the institution's artistic cause –as in Art Dubai in our case-, but also if the associate – sponsor, can stand for the institution's core values (Wright, 2014). Taking now into consideration the social role of BMW Group, a company that has focused its cultural cooperation on jazz and classical music, modern and contemporary art, and architecture and design, and that in 2016, inaugurated its initiative “BMW Contemporary”, which aims to strengthen the intercultural dialogues by bringing together artists and collectors from across the region<sup>132</sup> (bmw-me.com)<sup>133</sup>, the decision to proceed with such a sponsorship, especially since what officially BMW is asking for is its logo insertion and a brand experience in a specially designed area in the location of the fair, can be justified.

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Khalifa, Elie Khouri, Georges Makhoul, Lateefa Bint Maktoum, Fatima Maleki, Zain Masud, Shobha Pia Shamsdani, Lekha Poddar, Smita Prabhakar, Maya Rasamny, Sheikha Paula Al Sabah, Alia Al-Senussi, Abdelmomen Bin Eisa Alserkal, Ahmed Bin Shabib, Rashid Bin Shabib, Maria Sukkar, Sara & Faisal Tamer, Abdullah Al Turki and Mohamad Ali & Dina Zameli (artdubai.ae, *Committees*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/committees/> (last accessed in June 22, 2018)

<sup>131</sup> The second sponsor for the edition of Art Dubai 2018, was the champagne company Ruinart (Art Dubai, 2018).

<sup>132</sup> For every meeting and dialogue that opens through the BMW contemporary initiative, the public can find the stories in a series of online episodes at <https://www.bmw-me.com/>

<sup>133</sup> BMW Contemporary, <https://www.bmw-me.com/>, Retrieved from: <https://www.bmw-me.com/en/local-content/contemporary.html> (last accessed in June 29, 2018)

With their own turn but on a different note, the official partners of the fair have played an equally important role as the patrons and the sponsors, in the production and organizational side of Art Dubai. The Art Dubai Group has been strategically choosing its partners, creating strong and sustainable relations that have contributed as well in the evolution of Art Dubai, as of every other organization (Ostrower, 2003). The most obvious partner of the fair could only be Madinat Jumeirah, the Arabian Resort of Dubai -belonging to the ruling family, a fact that strengthens even more the relations of the institution with the government and can possibly justify the freedom that the ruling family has in terms of regulating the fair and limiting its autonomy-, that since 2008 has hosted every March the fair –along with some other private events that the Jumeirah Group hosts for the purposes of the fair, as the preview night of the fair (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>134</sup>. This partnership, except from the obvious –the fact that belongs to Al Maktoum family-, is based on the key location that the resort has to offer (Ostrower, 2003), as it is one of the most visited luxury resorts in the country. A second important partner of the fair, is Julius Baer. The leading Swiss private banking group-, that has requested its logo insertion and the freedom to host private events for selected collectors within the ground and the duration of the fair, has been since 2015 the official partner for the section of Art Dubai Contemporary and is also the exclusive supporter for the Art Dubai Fellowship<sup>135</sup>, a partnership that is based also on expanding the scope and legitimacy of both parties (Ostrower, 2003).

Some of the key partners of the fair are Institutions and non-profit organizations, that share the same core values with the institution of Art Dubai, such as the exclusive partner of Art Dubai's Modern section, is Saudi Arabia's Misk Art Institute, an organization operating under the auspices of the Misk Foundation<sup>136</sup>, that aims to inspire a dialogue between Saudi Arabia and the rest of the world (Misk Institute, 2018)<sup>137</sup>. Another key partner, is the Dubai Culture and Arts Authority of the Emirates, a strategic partner of Art Dubai, not only during the Art Week and the

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<sup>134</sup> artdubai.ae, *Fair Partners*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/fair-partners/> (last accessed in June 23, 2018)

<sup>135</sup> The partnership between Julius Baer and Art Dubai, comes in continuation to the bank's long-term commitment to supporting the UAE's emergence as both a business and cultural hub.

<sup>136</sup> Misk Art Institute and Foundation have been established by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud as part of Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision program (artdubai.ae).

<sup>137</sup> Misk Art Institute, miskartinstitute.org, Retrieved from: <https://miskartinstitute.org/about> (last accessed in June 29, 2018)



Dubai's art season, but throughout the year-round educational and non-profit programs of the Art Dubai group.

Other partnerships that Art Dubai Group has developed through these years are not always strictly art related, and a bright example of that can be the partnership with Piaget –a watchmaker and jewellers company, that has its own VIP hall, allowing the entrance only to renowned patrons and collectors and organizes events for the same audience, and the Fair's media partners: Aesthetica Magazine, artam Magazine, Art India – The Art News Magazine of India, Brownbook, divan – A journal of Accounts, Emirates Woman, Harper's Bazaar Art, International Sculpture Center, Khaleejjesque, Lepetitjournal.com, mousee, Russian Emirates, the Artling, Wallpaper, Apollo – The International Art Magazine, Art in the City, Canvas, Madame Dubai, ew moda, Islamic Arts – Visual Arts Magazine, Khaleej times, Magpie, My art Guides, Selections and many more, that every year, cover with extensive features in their pages the fair and its happenings (Art Dubai, 2018)<sup>138</sup>. For the cases of the just mentioned media partners, the fair offers not only access to the preview openings, in times dedicated only to the press, but it also gives access for exclusive interviews while it offers a specially designed space within the location, where visitors can purchase any of the mentioned prints.

### **Financial Elements**

After taking a closer look to the list of names of individuals and institutions that through all these years have supported Art Dubai, and after bringing in mind what is previously mentioned in page 85: “[...] managed to generate approximately thirty million EUR, with a total of 25,000 visits by 15,625 unique visitors, half of who came from outside of Dubai (Milliard, 2015)”, it is easily understandable that one of the main reasons that Art Dubai is able to attract such important collaborations, is the significant impact that the fair has in UAE's economy (Design Days Dubai, 2018)<sup>139</sup>.

Having overcome the majority of stereotypes that turn around art in the region, like: “The Middle Eastern art scene is a bubble”, “There is no institutional interest or acquisition”, or the most common misconception: “It is art inspired by conflict”

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<sup>138</sup> artdubai.ae, *Fair Partners*, Retrieved from: <http://www.artdubai.ae/fair-partners/> (last accessed in June 23, 2018)

<sup>139</sup> Deisgndaysdubai.ae, *Economic Impact of Dubai's Art Week Events Revealed in New Report*, Design Days Dubai

(Ayad, 2018), UAE's art market seems to be in a relatively positive position, with a rapid growth over the past decade (Alkhalisi, 2017), as although in the past someone could recognize as cultural hubs and capitals, places like Baghdad, Beirut, Damascus or Cairo, due to a number of political and economic challenges<sup>140</sup> the dynamic is now focused in the Gulf and especially UAE<sup>141</sup> (Ayad, 2018).

In order to paint a clearer image related to this issue, it could be mentioned that according to Sotheby's, the number of Middle Eastern clients participating in its global sales has risen by 76% over the past five years, while the interest from UAE is even stronger, with the noticeable increase of 157% (Alkhalisi, 2017). Taking now the example of another auction house, the one of Christie's, in their Middle Eastern art sale in March of 2017, they generated more than eight million dollars and managed to set new world auction records for twenty-eight artists (Alkhalisi, 2017). At this point we should not forget the two, new major institutional projects in the region, the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi –soon to be materialized-, and the Louvre Abu Dhabi that opened its doors to visitors in the end of 2017. Everything presented in this last paragraph leads us to one main assumption, that this secure, institutional and art-friendly environment, helped in the creation of a strong and sustainable community of collectors in the UAE (Brady, 2017).

It is crucial though to make a distinction, as one can talk about the market in UAE in general but can also be more specific by discussing Dubai's art market. While Abu Dhabi and Sharjah are the UAE's centres for non-profit cultural organisations, Dubai's arts ecosystem and its lively gallery scene, has marked it as UAE's art market's capital (Brady, 2017). One of the reasons why is that, is Alserkal Avenue<sup>142</sup>, a site consisted of former warehouses in the industrial Al Quoz district, that hosts the majority of the commercial galleries of the city, galleries that are the main core of Art Dubai's local participants (Brady, 2017). As for the international galleries that

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<sup>140</sup> An example could be the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 or the Syrian Civil War that has been in continuation since 2011, as a wider wave of the Arab spring, and all the financial outcomes that such events had for those regions.

<sup>141</sup> According to Alkhalisi: "As the commercial capital of the UAE, Dubai has also become the hub for the regional art scene. To support the growth, the city has set aside 500,000 square feet or 11,5 acres, for art spaces, galleries and creative businesses" (Alkhalisi, 2017).

<sup>142</sup> Alserkal Avenue was established in 2007 by Abdelmonem Bin Eisa Alserkal, one of Art Dubai's patrons (Brady, 2017)

decided to open a branch in Dubai<sup>143</sup>, all of which are regular participants in Art Dubai, taking advantage of the lack of a vibrant secondary market for contemporary art, they use the fair to build their main collectors' database and count on it for their main incomes throughout the year (Brady, 2017). And this slowly takes us to Art Dubai itself, and its relation to the galleries mentioned above, forming the main body of the fair. What follows is a vicious circle of interaction between Art Dubai and its galleries that as a common result, has a clear benefit on Dubai's art market, by creating a safe and sustainable financial environment.

If the fact that a growing number of international galleries open their branches in Dubai is not enough, entering the circulation discussed above, what should be mentioned is the individual number of galleries that participate in the fair, that within twelve years, has managed to be more than double (it started with approximately fifty galleries and it now exceeds the one hundred and ten). Along with that, the increasing number of collectors visiting the fair and acquiring artworks during Art Dubai, should cover any doubts. Regional and international collectors have realized that the prices are still affordable for the quality that the fair provides, and like that they can build their collection on a smaller budget (Chaudhary, 2012). Along with the fact that for international collectors there are not taxes applied, and even for the UAE based collectors the just-added (from the 1<sup>st</sup> on January 2018) tax goes up to the 5%, the circumstances seem to still be ideal for any kind of art deal and transaction.

Due to the privacy that this kind of transactions has, it is quite difficult to know the exact amounts that have been achieved during the fair the past years (Ayad, 2018). Except from the amount of thirty million EUR that has been officially given to the light of public, as the Art Dubai's expenditure in the city in 2015, we can only rely on facts that gallerists have shared with the press over the years, to make our own estimations. In order to create this short estimation some examples of lower and highest prices mentioned through the years of 2011 and 2015 will be used. Starting from 2011, even though the first days the fair seemed to sell more its mid-range works, in the closure of the fair big sales took place. Overall, it could be said that the

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<sup>143</sup> One of the international galleries that opened also a branch in Dubai, is the Custot Gallery. The rent for the initially Mayfair based gallery would cost approximately 4 times more than the rent that Custot had to pay in Dubai (Brady, 2017), a fact that can give us one more explanation about the rise of international galleries in the city.

lowest prices of sold works were between 3,000 – 4,300 EUR<sup>144</sup>, while one of the highest prices reported, was the one from the work *Dream 40* (1988 – 2013) (see figure 13), by the Syrian Safwan Dahoul's series *Repetitive Dreams*, a black and white painting depicting a sad female figure, that sold for 250,000 EUR (Canvas daily, 2011).

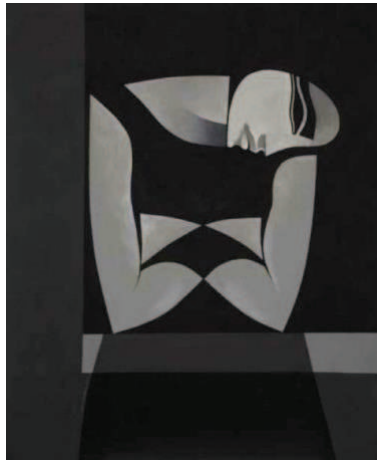


Figure 13  
Safwan Dahoul (Syria, 1961)  
*Dream 40* (1988 - 2013)  
Acrylic on Canvas  
180 x 200 cm  
Repetitive Dreams Series  
Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery

As the artist would mention while talking about this series:

“As the title suggests, I’ve looked at repetitive dreams. But what I was really trying to explore is that every day waking life is very repetitive, too. Nothing changes. Even though I moved to Dubai a year ago, the news I read every day from Syria remain the same. No one is standing up for these people who are getting killed every day. The paintings have a lot of sadness in them because of that, but at the same time I am always seeking joy in my life” (Safwan Dahoul cited by East, 2013).

One year later, as a report for the first public day of the fair, a series of photographs produced in 2009 from the UAE-based artist Jumana Manna, was sold for less than 1,700 EUR each (Canvas daily, 2012). The photos discussed one of the

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<sup>144</sup> In the price of 4,300 EUR it was sold a neon box by Tamara Al-Sammaraei (Canvas daily, 2011)

main areas of interest of the artist, which is the formations of community, patriarchy and journeys, that construct the human identity in relation to national narratives, through portraits of morally dubious characters and events (CRG Gallery, 2012)<sup>145</sup>. For the same year, the sales of the rest of the works marked an average sold price close to 68,000 EUR (Canvas daily, 2012). In 2013, with a more positive feedback than the previous year but with the prices moving on the same range, the participating galleries managed to sell the majority of their exhibited works (Canvas daily, 2013). In 2014, only on the second day of the public days, the pop art work *Top of the World* (2011) (see figure 14) of the Iranian artist Farhad Moshiri, questioning the commonalities of the East and the West, presented from the gallery The Third Line was sold for the amount of approximately 17,200 EUR.

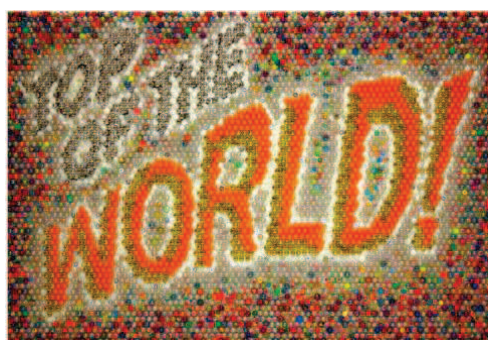


Figure 14  
Farhad Moshiri (Shiraz, 1963)  
*Top of the World* (2011)  
Acrylic, plastic pearls, crystals, glitter and glaze on canvas, mounted  
on board  
168 x 250 x 10 cm  
Courtesy of Farhad Moshiri and The Third Line

The lowest price reported was the work *Festive* of Mujahidin Nurrahman (see figure 15), an ode to the traditional motifs that challenge the pre-conceived perceptions on the multitude of social, political and spiritual beliefs, that was sold for approximately 5,200 EUR (Canvas daily, 2014).

<sup>145</sup> CRG Gallery, (2012), *Art Dubai 2012 | Jumana Manna | Mar 21-24*, Retrieved from: <http://crggallery.com/art-dubai-2012-jumana-manna-mar-21-24/> (last accessed in August 28, 2018)



Figure 15  
 Mujahidin Nurrahman (Bandug, 1982)  
*F(estive)-16* (2014)  
 Acrylic, Cutting Paper Manual  
 76 x 56,3 x 7,8 cm  
 Festive Series  
 Courtesy of Mujahidin Nurrahman and Athr Gallery

For the last year of this timeline, one year that was once again really positive for the majority of galleries that attended the fair, the prices seemed to vary between a medium range of amounts, from (approximately) 8,500 to 70,000 EUR (Canvas daily, 2015).

One mention of significant importance, is the fact that –as briefly mentioned above- in UAE for the first time in 2018, there was the application of 5% VAT (Valued Added Tax), which caused a lot of confusion and fear around the potential sales to local collectors. On the contrary, the sales seemed to be quite satisfactory and the number of visitors for one more year increased (Mohammad, 2018), while some of the galleries even managed to sell the whole booth, as for instance Galerie Kornfeld, that sold all the works of the Iranian artist Farshad Farzankia, to local and international collectors before the last day of the fair.

What can be noticed from the above is that (1) there is a certain preference to regional artists when it comes to acquiring works during Art Dubai, even though international and well-established artists are also presented in the galleries' halls, (2) up to today, due to its hosting city's tax policy, the fair remains an attractive option for both international and local collectors (3) the increasing number of participating galleries and the fact that the fair itself grows bigger year by year, proves that Art Dubai is one of the most beneficial art fairs, while providing a range of different prices to the collectors who visit the booths.

At this point, in order to better comprehend the tremendous and remarkable impact that Art Dubai has to the economic growth of the entire state of UAE and its entire cultural aspect, we could bring in mind the idea of “planetarity” as first Spivak introduced it. For this purpose, Art Dubai will be considered a micrography of a considered contemporary society. According to Spivak, what is essential is not only an ongoing collaboration of various academic disciplines but most importantly the establishment of a ‘one-world’ notion and mind-set. It is time to change our vision and the standards that allow a combination of colonization and globalization to create political boundaries and divisions. And since -as it was already mentioned-, all social systems are connected and interacting, the social and political notion of Planetarity, automatically affects the financial aspects of everyday life. As humans, both our actions and us, tend towards exteriority, towards consolidation with the other (Spivak, 2012). This important element of the human nature, along with the fact that arts and culture, carry along the weight of identity and belonging, make the efforts and the positive financial results of Art Dubai –even though for many it is still considered an experiment for the international art market-, even more significant for the whole state of UAE.





## 5. Conclusions

The etymological dimension of art fairs, originated by the old English word *fæger* which means beautiful, indicating the special focus on the aesthetical dimension of this organization in its first centuries of existence, in different forms and different extents, has been incubating in societies for centuries, contributing slowly to the shape that art fairs have today. It all started with the religious fairs that would manage to connect visitors from distant places, while offering the opportunity for the creation of a social and commercial connection – perhaps what would be called today networking -, in special days of the year, calling for the interruption of everyday activities. What followed was the champagne and artisanal fairs, annual events that for the first time introduced three other important notions of the art fairs as we know them today: (1) the relation to politics -as the dissolution of the Roman Empire on the 5<sup>th</sup> century meant the pausing of such activities until the 7<sup>th</sup> century and the rise of the Frankish Kingdom- (the champagne fairs); (2) the international presence of the participants, that would travel from distant lands in order to be part of the fair; and (3) the booths' layout and structure, which was introduced for the first time in the artisanal fairs, while displaying the goods as per their composition and quality. Eventually, the artisanal fairs would give their spot to a new type of fairs/exhibitions as the 'Salon de Paris', produced by the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture of Paris, that contributed with its own turn to the formation of public taste and to the setting of reputation of the participant artists, that were strictly selected. Almost a century later, for the first time an art fair with the same notion as today, made its appearance. Art Cologne, that as an initial goal had the promotion of young and emerging German artists, managed to exceed the initial expectations and become the formative influence for the art market's development and the evolution of the art fairs. But it did appear one important gap: it was limited to number of strictly German participant galleries. This gap was covered in 1970, only three years after the inauguration of Art Cologne, with Art Basel, that from its very first edition welcomed ninety galleries from ten different countries, changing what was known until then for the networking character of the fair, as it facilitated connection among art dealers, gallerists and professionals attending from outside of the local networks.

This short timeline helps us understand that even though the institution of the fair had to change names, policies and directions, it managed to survive as centuries

passed. This provides important information about the relation that has been developed between each and every society and this institution, which can be conceived as one of the tools of the various systems that form it. Bringing one more time in mind the theory of Niklas Luhmann about the social systems (1984), it is important to mention, that societies are consisted of several systems (like for instance the political, social, financial, science, law, and art). Those systems are linked and associated through a continuous communication that most importantly helps them affect one another. This fact, as the core of our research helping us answer the research questions, explains how art fairs, found the way to adapt in the new standards of each contemporary society and survive all these centuries. The social, political and financial evolutions of the world had a clear impact on the regions and countries that through the years have developed an art market and consequently to all the tools that the art market presents, tools that in this case and for the purposes of this research, will be the art fairs.

Throughout the dissertation the social, political and financial realms as they have been portrayed in the institution of the art fair were explored, with a special focus on the ways that these aspects were presented throughout the existence of the case study, Art Dubai. Art Dubai, a still emerging art fair that was created within an interesting context of social, political and financial dimensions, along with the rapid development of its host city, managed to establish itself on the map of international annual art events, welcoming some of the most significant galleries, institutions, art professionals, collectors and artists in its ground. Acknowledging this rapid growth of Art Dubai, the first international art fair of the so-called Middle East, but still in need to focus further on its purpose and actions, this dissertation aimed on exploring the heart of the fair starting from its history, and continuing with its agenda in relation to society –in its different realms.

Art Dubai, an idea that was realized at a time of a general financial growth in the Emirates, as a result of the real estate and oil exploitation boom, made its appearance in 2007 as the (then called) Gulf Art Fair. Twelve years later, the fair has managed to exceed expectations, with the participation of more than one hundred participating galleries from all over the world and dynamic collaborations and initiatives. It is exactly through these collaborations and initiatives that the extents that art fairs, and Art Dubai in particular, were observed, through everything they have showcased over the years.

Starting our exploration from the impact on the international art market and its financial aspects, the first and most significant one lies on the fact that art fairs have changed the way collectors purchase their works, as the number of clients who will choose to proceed to an acquirement through individual galleries has been significantly reduced. This fact has had two important outcomes: one positive, which is the considerably high profit that galleries manage to get through their participation at the fairs and the sales of the presented artworks, and one negative, which is the incapability of smaller galleries to repel the current situation, as they are asked to enter a vicious circle where they need to choose between participating in art fairs and having to pay extremely high fees, and having an agenda that does not include art fairs, which might seriously damage their and their artists' reputation -and in some cases even jeopardize their existence.

In any case, the impact that the institution of the art fair has had on a financial level, came as economic-related activities are being developed within its own circle, mainly through partnerships and sponsorships, with institutions and corporations. Especially talking now about the case of corporations –as these have the potential of being the most problematic ones-, it is true that they have helped art fairs maintain and improve their activities and their overall image. But as sponsorship or partnership is a strong business exchange, the institution of the art fair, before proceeding to any of these collaborations needs to carefully examine two things: (1) what do these corporations ask in return and (2) if these corporations share the same core values as the institution. Those questions need to be answered before engaging to a collaboration that might eventually harm the social and political reputation of the institution.

The last point that can be addressed regarding the financial dimensions of the art fair comes in coordination with the social and political aspects of the presented works. Even though the art market transparency does not give all the necessary information for the creation of the complete image, if art fairs can be indeed considered mediators that engage and educate the audience to have a more critical view at current happenings, while learning to appreciate art that is not aiming on pure aestheticism, but mainly on presenting the beauty and the ugliness that contemporary societies hide, it could be argued that they fail their mission, as still, artworks with strong social and political character seem to be less saleable, and evaluated in a lower

price range than decorative works. Art fairs, an institution based on hierarchy and capitalism, seems to fail on providing the same opportunities and chances to all participant artists and galleries, that in the altar of financial profit need to reconsider their values and works.

Continuing to the social dimension of the fairs, the cultural third places that promote a culture of experimentation, while staging knowledge and cultures, we come to notice 4 main points:

1. Through their strong networking character, art fairs manage to benefit the artists that enter their gates, either by helping them maintain their reputation or by helping them build their name, and in some cases brand. Hundreds of thousands of visitors get to see their works, while most importantly they get to meet and introduce their practice to art critics, private and institutional collectors, to art dealers and other stakeholders and opinion makers.
2. Art fairs are a platform for the blooming of cultural interaction, one of the key elements that can help in the process of building bridges between distant cultures, between the East and the West, and in the process of the annihilation of Western and Eurocentric perspectives. As Arjun Appadurai would argue, cultural interaction is an integral part of contemporary societies, and if international art fairs can be considered a micrography of the societies, in their interactions, they can be seen as a part of society. This idea though applies under certain circumstances. Bringing in mind Alistair Hudson's idea while talking about art and social change, the reflection on the plurality of our cultures and artistic developments, can eventually bring the elimination of Eurocentric and Western perspectives and approaches. This reflection is being presented through collaborations of different institutions (as the example of Art Dubai and the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London) and through discussions developed between people of different backgrounds, different disciplines and different origins, aiming to maintain diversity in the discussed topics, and providing cultural diversity in a globalized world.
3. The social dimensions of an art fair are closely related to the process of mediation, as the art fair, mainly through its initiatives and the presented artworks, becomes the means that can produce knowledge and the understanding of the messages communicated through the artworks. At the same time, this process also enhances the critical understanding and positioning towards social and cultural phenomena.

Talking about the process of mediation through different initiatives, we can take as an example, activities dedicated to children like the Sheikha Manal Little Artists Program of Art Dubai, that aims on enhancing the creativity and the critical thinking of young children based in UAE, through their interaction with socially and politically engaged artists from all around the world. While referring to the process of mediation coming from the different messages communicated through the presented artworks, many examples have been mentioned throughout the dissertation, proving that the art world is working towards on committing to showing critical artworks in a continuously changing cultural climate.

4. Art fairs embrace the convivial culture, and as Paul Gilroy would suggest, they provide the multicultural space and ground for a better understanding of the differences and similarities of each society and culture, with mutual respect and understanding (2004). This creates an intellectual space for creation of great importance, especially in the cases like Middle East, where the freedom of thought and creation is still a disputed territory.

This last point becomes an interesting trigger for discussing the conclusions related to the political realms and undertones, as those can be found within the institution of the art fair. We live in the time of “useful art” (Bruguera, 2011), in a time where artworks and artists do not aim in an anesthetization of the reality and everyday life, but mainly focus on the context that embraces the creative process, embracing the “beauty of being useful” (Bruguera, 2011). This again can be understood through different elements of today’s international art fairs.

Before getting though to the core of this idea, and the exploration of the political works within the context of an international art fair, we will reflect on two dimensions: (1) the relation of the fair with its host city; and (2) the political relations developed within the context of the fair. Art fairs have a political impact in their host cities, as they have the power even for the duration of a few days to transform their host city in a vivid and culturally engaged art capital, with influential and important people of the arts and of different disciplines visiting the fair. This rebranding, although it helps indeed each hosting city financially, socially and politically, has the potential to also create a false image of it, in some cases completely different from the one that the city actually presents on its daily basis. Such a rebranding also takes place during Art Dubai, as because of the numerous social and cultural events that

take place under the auspices of the Art Dubai team, the audience might easily be misled to think that Dubai is a place free of censorship and social or political restrictions. Another example that can be used in order to justify this argument, comes from Russia, a place that often imprisons its artists, imposing them to stark limits to fundamental human rights, while at a parallel time, such facts are being covered while the city of Moscow celebrates for eight continuous years the existence of its international art fair, Cosmoscw.

Getting now to the second mentioned dimension we can refer to the political relations developed within the context of the art fairs. These relations can vary from the involution of people of significant importance to different art fairs to political scandals, like it happened in the case of the “Panama Papers” and the involvement of important art dealers and art patrons, to the almost disclosed guidance that art fairs’ teams get from their governments. For this, the example of Art Dubai seems one of the most appropriate, as the involvement of the government in the function of the institution has been repeated several times. One of the most significant cases has been the line that has been followed by the Art Dubai team, in not including in its schedule and in its line-up any Israeli gallery or artist, following the government’s line which has interrupted any formal economic or diplomatic ties with Israeli citizens and officials. This as a fact, could be argued that it shows the absence of independency of the institution, in times where it is needed more than ever, as only like that the art fair can guarantee the cultural and creative diversity that is needed and requested.

The other times that the government of UAE seemed to have an involvement in the operation of the fair, gets us back to what has been mentioned in the beginning of this paragraph, and the introduction of the “useful art” and political art in the art fairs. Art fairs over the past years have become a platform of expression and awareness on social and political issues, with an increasing number of artists taking the chance to discuss through their works topics that really concern them. Artists, in the place of mediators create works of different dynamics, that protest and discuss contemporary phenomena such as neo-colonialism, sexual exploitation, social and political injustice, war, violence, and racism. Fair directors have openly suggested that they are committed to showing critical artworks, while also presenting a preference to artists that are relevant and engaged to the current happenings –especially in the cases of emerging artists-. But while this is one of the most positive aspects of the institution, it is exactly there that lies one of its biggest failures: the existence of censorship. The

cases of censorship within the institution are multiple and continuous, in the East and the West. Focusing on Art Dubai, the people in charge have more than once followed the orders of the government that suggested to either remove artworks completely from galleries' booths, either cover the spots that might cause conflict. And once again, as already mentioned, this shows the failure of the institution on embracing its independency, and unfortunately, its contribution to a political anesthetization, not allowing the artists and the artworks to act as per their mission.

Taking now all the above into consideration, how can the main research question (What do art fairs do in the social, political and economic realms), be answered with one single sentence? It could be probably said that the institution of the art fair continues on bringing new standards to the art market, changing -in both positive and negative turns- the way it has been functioning over the past centuries, while at the same time it manages to present strong social responsibility through the cultural diversity that its programs offer, failing though to establish and acquire its political independence.

But maybe the most crucial information that can be pointed out of this answer and out of the whole dissertation, is that the institution has managed to survive over the centuries because of its capacity to make changes and adapt to each contemporary society and environment. It is most probably now the right moment for new adaptations to be made in the institution of the fair. Acknowledging the warnings and red flags that have been raised by art professionals and experts, it could be argued that the evolution and the survival of the institution lies on the need of those changes. Changes that - as artworks at their best – show the multilayered and constant changes in the world we live in, changes that will be able to fight the power relations involved in the selection of the participants and the artworks in the art fairs –or in other words, the selection of what can be said and what must remain in silence.



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